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the roleplaying magazine

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The Man Who Killed Roleplaying?
Magic's inventor pleads his case

The Golden Dragon Inn
A massive 16-page encounter with maps and everything

Happy New Year
Games to look forward to in 1996

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A revolution in Advanced Dungeons and Dragons?

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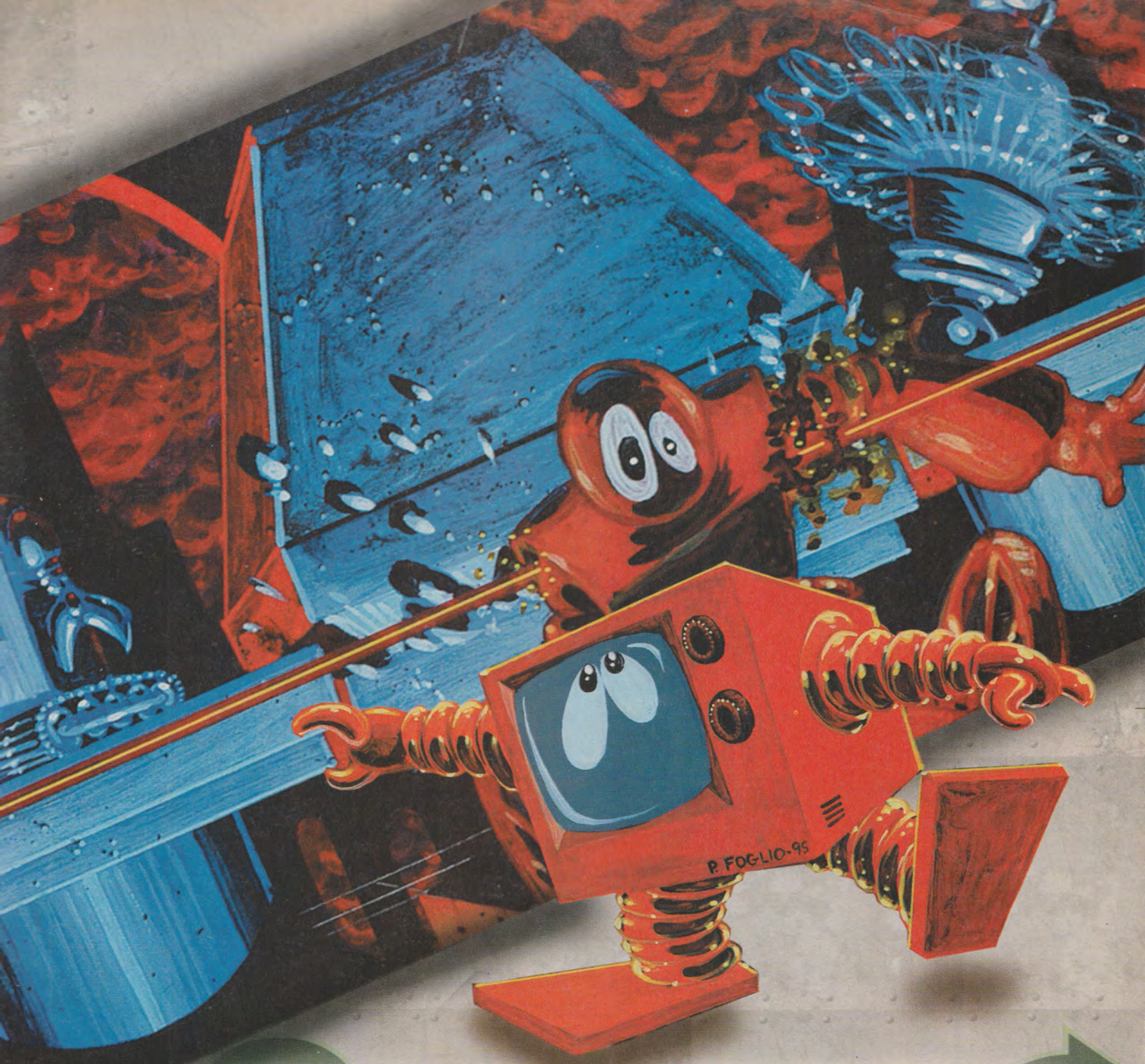

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GARFIELD GAMES

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BREAK THE MOULD

Simple and effective strategies for making your non-player characters come alive begin on page 28

arcane
Marvel Overpower
It's the grudge match of the year
overpower vs wildstorm
"All the cards you need to play are in the deck you buy"

GRUDGE MATCH

Two new superhero card games, one from Marvel and one from Image... which is the best? We decide on page 66

WORLD BUILDER PART 2:
FLORA AND FAUNA
Once upon a time, the approach to stocking your world with plants and animals was simple. You didn't bother. But now, Dan Joyce explains, you can get much more from your game if you take time to plan a realistic environment...

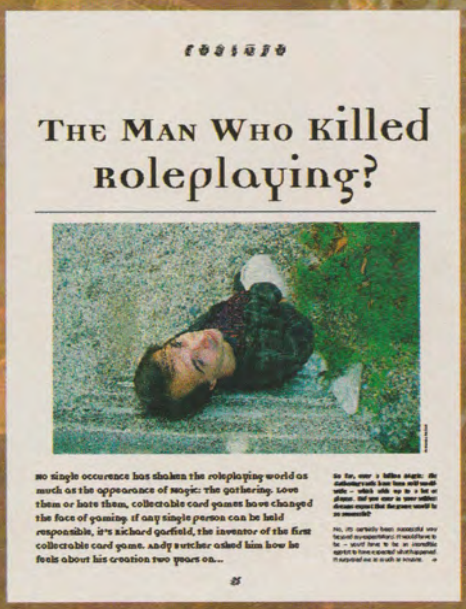
SKILLS & POWERS

st thing to happen to *AD&D* in a long nk so. Find out why on page 60

FLORA AND FAUNA

Yes, it's time to think about animals and plants in the second of our five-part wordbuilding guide on page 34

dStorms
Card Booster Pack S2
Out now
el vs images, the breakaway
en pany. who wins? read on.
"The only unqualified good point is the art"
Score 6/10



ENCOUNTERS: THE GOLDEN DRAGON INN

16 pages – 4 complete maps – lots of fun. Pull-out & keep our second epic encounter.
It starts on page 43

THE MAN WHO KILLED ROLEPLAYING?

Richard Garfield tells us all about *Magic: The Gathering* in our exclusive interview which begins on page 25

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This issue would have been impossible without... **Galleon Antiques**
This issue would have been a lot easier without... **Moving office**

Illustration Simon Gurr

Up Front

Zzzzzzz.....

Oh, sorry. I guess I must have dozed off there. That'll be all the late nights and hard work that has gone into making **arcane** 2 so much better than **arcane** 1. In our opinion, of course.

Not that **arcane** 1 was a job badly done, especially not if all the kind letters and faxes of congratulation you sent in were genuine. Which I'm sure they were. So thank you for all those, some of them are reprinted in our letters pages (95-97) this month.

The more astute among you will notice that we're bigger this month than we were last. An encouraging trend that we hope will continue in the new year.

Our major review this month is, unsurprisingly, the one we've featured on the cover. *Skills & Powers* is quite excellent and thoroughly deserves our highest accolade, the **arcane** seal of approval. Find out what all the fuss is about and why *AD&D* need never be the same again, by turning immediately to page 60 and reading our glowing review.

The big bonus of the job this month, aside from all your lovely letters of course, was going to Gaelcon in Dublin. A super little convention, very much fan-based and in the most glorious setting, Gaelcon reminded me what made me get involved in roleplaying in the first place. Fun. People came from all over Ireland, Britain and indeed the World, just to play games. It was there that we met up with Richard Garfield, the inventor of *Magic: The Gathering* and managed to get an interview from him. He's a very sweet, unassuming fellow, I don't imagine that many people who saw him walking about the convention would have imagined that he is the most significant (not to say wealthy) member of the gaming community today. All that and he was quite happy to pull faces for our photographer. What a star.

Some of you seem confused that we devote so much of our coverage to collectable card games. In fact, it would probably be fair to say that some of you were quite annoyed about it. As far as we're concerned, CCGs are as much a part of our hobby these days as anything else. If you can buy it in a specialist gaming shop, we'll cover it. In our experience lots of roleplayers play CCGs as well. And as further evidence of the strong links between the two forms of gaming, I encourage you to read what Richard Garfield has to say starting on page 25.

Anyway that's enough of my wibble. It's about time I got started on issue 3. Until next issue, then...

Happy Yuletide.

Steve Faragher
Editor
sfaragher@futurenet.co.uk

Despatches

Like spiders in a web, we sit. And wait. Until a feeble tremor of news reaches us. Then we suddenly pounce, devour and regurgitate it for you. Thank us.

HAPPY NEW YEAR

To further the interests of our readers' gaming exploits, arcane has spent the entire month on the phone, bugging people for tantalising tidbits about their latest projects. So here's our guide to the biggest releases of 1996...

As well as branching out into card games, Chaosium is planning to make a move into live roleplaying in 1996, with the release of *Cthulhu Live*, a set of rules and guidelines for running freeform *Call Of Cthulhu* sessions, similar to the Minds Eye Theatre series from White Wolf.

Interplay have signed with Steve Jackson Games to produce a series of computer games based on the successful *GURPS* series. The first game, which will have a near future setting and include material from *Ultratech* and *Robots*, should be ready for a Christmas '96 release. Time Travel and Fantasy games are also planned.

Dragonlance game

The world of Krynn returns. In the wake of the latest novel, *Dragons Of Summer Flame* (see review page 91), TSR are planning a new release, *DragonLance: The Fifth Age.*

Surprisingly, though, this is not going to be a revised edition of the original *AD&D* campaign world, but a completely new, stand alone game system specifically designed to complement the world's rich background. According to TSR, the system will emphasise roleplaying and character development over combat and number crunching, accurately portraying the epic atmosphere of the world. A series of supplements and other support materials is also planned.

DragonLance: The Fifth Age will be released by TSR in August, with supplements to follow.

Advanced Dungeons & Dragons

Spells & Magic

The biggest *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* release in the first half of next year will be the *Player's Option: Spells & Magic* rulebook, the last in the *Player's Option* series. Designed to complement the currently available *Combat & Tactics* and *Skills & Powers* books, *Spells & Magic* aims to give the same in-depth treatment to, erm, spells and magic. New optional rules and game systems will allow players a whole range of new choices and opportunities for any magic using character. Let's hope that it's up to the same high standard set by the excellent *Skills & Powers* book, recipient of this issue's **arcane** Seal Of Approval (see page 60).

Player's Option: Spells & Magic will be released by TSR in May, priced, like the others, at around £12.

In Nomine

Although Steve Jackson Games is still unwilling to set a definite release date for its theologically dubious *In Nomine*, the game will eventually see the light of day next year. *In Nomine* faces players with the choice of being an angel or a devil and becoming one of the foot soldiers in the eternal struggle between God and, well, that other bloke with the nasty reputation. This is not a game that's likely to sell well in the Southern states of America.

In Nomine will be released by Steve Jackson Games in the first half of 1996.

GURPS

Goblins

Steve Jackson Games' *GURPS* has always been one of the best supported systems around, and 1996 is going to be no exception. The big release for the first half of the year is *GURPS Goblins*, which describes a nightmarish version of eighteenth century London where all the inhabitants are goblins – stupid, crass,

The Young Turks

Not all of next year's big releases are for existing systems, or even from the established companies – and the new kids on the block certainly have some interesting plans...

Visionary Publishing

The new home of Sam Chupp (the man who is said to have made the World of Darkness what it is), Visionary is a 'rules-light, story-heavy' company which draws strongly on the ideas of mythology writer Joseph Campbell and has two games in production. *Past Lives* will focus on what-might-have-been and ties it all in to parallel universes, and *Neverland* will be about the darker side of childhood make-believe and imaginary friends.

Releasing bold, innovative game designs is usually a short-cut to commercial suicide, but Visionary's team looks like it has the talent, the foresight and the production budget to make these games look good and play well.

Hogshead Publishing

Another innovative game that should be both humorous and playable is *FRUP* from Hogshead Publishing (see **arcane** 1). This promises clever game mechanics, attention to detail and lots of nonsense fun. James Wallis has built a game around the premise that *D&D* rulebooks fall from the sky and are taken as signs from the gods. Hogshead's head honcho says: "Yes, *FRUP* is a silly humour game, but we've made sure it's also a genuinely playable RPG. The game will be properly supported – we have several supplements in the works." Meanwhile, Hogshead are working on an epic SF system, *Buck Naked in the 25th Century*. The mind boggles.

Daedalus Entertainment

Due to production nightmares, the release of the Daedalus RPG *Feng Shui* (awarded the **arcane** seal of approval last issue) will be postponed until April. The game is based on the same background as the card game *Shadowfist* – a secret war where factions seek control of the sites where Chi, the life force, is concentrated and stored. Daedalus is definitely a company worth watching, and we expect this utterly superb RPG to be every bit as successful as the card game. If it isn't, we'll want to know why...

Cyberrealms

Speaking of production nightmares, the six Canadians from Ontario that are Cyberrealms are due to finally release their fantasy roleplaying game *Shattered Realms* next Spring.

The *Shattered Realms* themselves are planetary shards believed to have been born of a cosmic cataclysm that destroyed a single, great world of many gods. Only flying creatures, skyships and those with the right spells can travel between the shards.

The game uses the company's unique ReFlex system, which certainly sounds impressive, and the background also seems to have a lot of potential. Of course, we'll have to wait and see...

prank-loving, violent goblins, with more than a little magic about them. With rules for duelling, cheating and sexually transmitted diseases, it's certainly going make an interesting read...

GURPS Goblins will be released by Steve Jackson games in the Spring.

The Rod of Seven Parts, the 'Holy Grail' of the *AD&D* game, is one of the great mysteries of *AD&D* game literature. Its existence is widely known, but no-one has yet undertaken the huge task of finding it. In an adventure to be published next August, TSR will finally reveal its true power and location...

SHADOWRUN

California Free State

FASA continues the task of describing the Sixth World of *Shadowrun* with the long awaited *California Free State* sourcebook. Detailing everything that both referees and players could ever want to know about the sunshine state, including secret societies, organised crime, the odd dragon or two and extensive details of the 'free' state's Japanese 'peacekeeping forces'. Throw in the exciting likes of city sprawls, megacorps and magical enclaves, and things look set to get even more interesting.

California Free State will be released by FASA in the Spring.

BATTLETECH

The Periphery

Also due from FASA is *The Periphery* sourcebook for *BattleTech*, describing the worlds, people and armies of the vast region of space that lies beyond the Inner Sphere. Hi-tech pirates raid the spaceways as countless kingdoms struggle to maintain their independence. Alone, these petty governments have little effect on Inner Sphere Politics. Collectively, they represent a crucial element in the balance of power. And of course, there's plenty of excuses for some 'Mech battles...

CYBERPUNK

Cyberpunk 3rd edition

Now that the cyberpunk genre is firmly established, Mike Pondsmith intends to return to his seminal roleplaying system and thoroughly investigate the world it describes, discussing both how and why it works. The result will be *Cyberpunk 3rd edition*. More than a simple revision of the rules, this will be a complete reworking of the game's setting, containing more depth and detail than ever before. With the lessons learnt in the production of *Castle Falkenstein*, R Talsorian promises it will also be the best looking book that it's produced yet.

Cyberpunk 3rd edition will be released by R Talsorian in the Summer.

WARHAMMER

Wood Elves

The next major *Warhammer Fantasy Battle* release will be the *Wood Elves' Army Book*. This guide reveals the thorny nature of the Wood Elves, whose forces are spearheaded by new Eagle riders and quickstepping Wardancers, who will be foxing foes with a host of new skills. Amongst the rank and file can now be found the Dryads, treemen twiglets who presumably do battle in a spinney formation. Or maybe not.

Space Hulk

Also on the way is a completely new version of *Space Hulk*, the aliens-esque game of combat between Imperial Terminator Marines and the vicious alien Genestealers.

The *Wood Elves Army Book* will be released by Games Workshop in the Spring, with the new version of *Space Hulk* to follow later in the year.

TRAVELLER The New Era

Reformation Coalition Player's Handbook
Regency Starship Guide

Game Designers' Workshop will continue to strongly support the seminal science fiction roleplaying game, *Traveller: The New Era*, with next year's most imminent releases being the *Reformation Coalition Player's Handbook*, which includes a great deal of advice on roleplaying a citizen of the Coalition, and the *Regency Starship Guide*, packed full of new high-tech starship designs for a Regency campaign. The starships featured in the *Regency Starship Guide* are many and various including the Beowulf-class Free Trader. Also included will be descriptions of oodles of new equipment and weaponry for tech-heads everywhere.

The *Reformation Coalition Player's Handbook* and the *Regency Starship Guide* will both be released by GDW in the Spring.

CALL of CTHULHU

The *AD&D CD-ROM Player's Handbook* comprising the *Player's Handbook*, the *Dungeon Master's Guide* and the *Monstrous Manual* in computerised form will be out in August at US$59.95

Delta Green

Pagan Publishing are set to explore a different form of horror with the release of the *Delta Green* sourcebook for *Call Of Cthulhu*. Pagan Publishing's magazine, *The Unspeakable Oath*, has been publishing *Delta Green* material for some time – long before the *X-Files* appeared – and the book details a secret organisation that spans various US law-enforcement agencies, and will also investigate the history of government involvement with alien entities.

The *Delta Green Sourcebook* will be released by Pagan Publishing in the Spring. We're impatient.

Gold Rush Games have the license from Hero Games to produce adventures for use with the Hero System. The first book is scheduled for February and contains three adventures written by Chris Avellone (*Underworld Enemies* and *Dystopia*), Bruce Tong (Enemies for Hire), and newcomer Jim Crocker. Artwork is by Storn Cook and Greg Smith.

Vampire: The Dark Ages

White Wolf are one of the most prolific games publishers around, and it's going to be just as busy next year. The biggest release will be the launch a new line of historical Storyteller games for the World of Darkness. The first in the series, *Vampire: The Dark Ages*, will be set in medieval Europe before the formation of the Camarilla. Although completely compatible with *Vampire: The Masquerade*, the game will also stand alone, requiring no knowledge of the World of Darkness.

Vampire: The Dark Ages will be released by White Wolf in March.

SLA Industries 2nd Edition

A second and fully revised edition of Nightfall Games' first roleplaying system is currently being written. As the Glasgow-based firm has now merged with the mighty Wizards of the Coast, we can look forward to higher production standards – hopefully including some coherent design and an index to complement the game's stunningly atmospheric setting.

SLA Industries 2nd Edition is scheduled to be released by Wizards Of The Coast in the Summer.

MAGIC The Gathering™

No, despite the familiar logo above that will have already stopped some of you reading, this is not news of yet another expansion set for the phenomenally successful card game, but something a little bit different.

Despite the inevitable cloak of secrecy surrounding such a mammothly important project, **arcane** is able to exclusively reveal that Wizards Of The Coast's Alter Ego design team are currently working all hours on bringing us the oft-rumoured *Magic: The Gathering* roleplaying game.

Casting the players as Planeswalkers, able to travel between the many worlds of Dominia, the game promises to not only draw heavily on the existing background of the card game, but also reveal new aspects of the setting. You don't even want to know what hideous tortures and escapades our cunning spies had to go through to get hold of this information, and you'll just have to trust us at the moment.

Things are still at a very early stage in the game design and so obviously no firm date has yet been set for the release of *The Magic: The Gathering* roleplaying game. Current estimates are that it should surface late next year or early in 1997.

Is there no stopping them?

The seemingly endless stream of collectable card game releases seems set to continue well into 1996. After much sorting through piles of press releases, confirming rumours and pestering game companies, though, arcane has actually been able to discover a few that sound like they might be rather good indeed...

Mythos

This is nothing less than the *Call Of Cthulhu* collectable card game, and we think it's going to be completely great. Of course, the fact that *Call of Cthulhu* is far and away one of our favourite roleplaying systems of all time might make us a bit biased, but when in living memory have Chaosium ever produced a duff game?

Mythos is planned to be released by Chaosium in March.

Netrunner

Richard Garfield's third card game, *Netrunner* is a game of cyberspace combat and devious schemes, based on a combination of his love of cyberpunk literature and R Talsorian's excellent *Cyberpunk* roleplaying system. Any new game from Garfield is worthy of note.

Netrunner will be released by Wizards Of The Coast in the Spring.

DC Overpower

With *Marvel Overpower* just off the presses, Fleer is planning to release a DC Comics version of the game early next year. *Overpower* may not be the deepest card game around, but anything that'll let you pit the Joker and Doc Doom against Wolverine and Batman has got to be worth a look...

DC Overpower will be released by Fleer in the Spring.

The BattleTech CCG?

No-one knows exactly what this is going to be called, but Wizards Of The Coast are definitely working on a card-based version of FASA's popular robot combat system. Details are still sketchy, but striding around in a 100 ton death machine and blowing things up is the sort of thing that appeals to us.

The *BattleTech CCG* will be released by Wizards Of The Coast in the Spring.

Star Trek: The Original Series

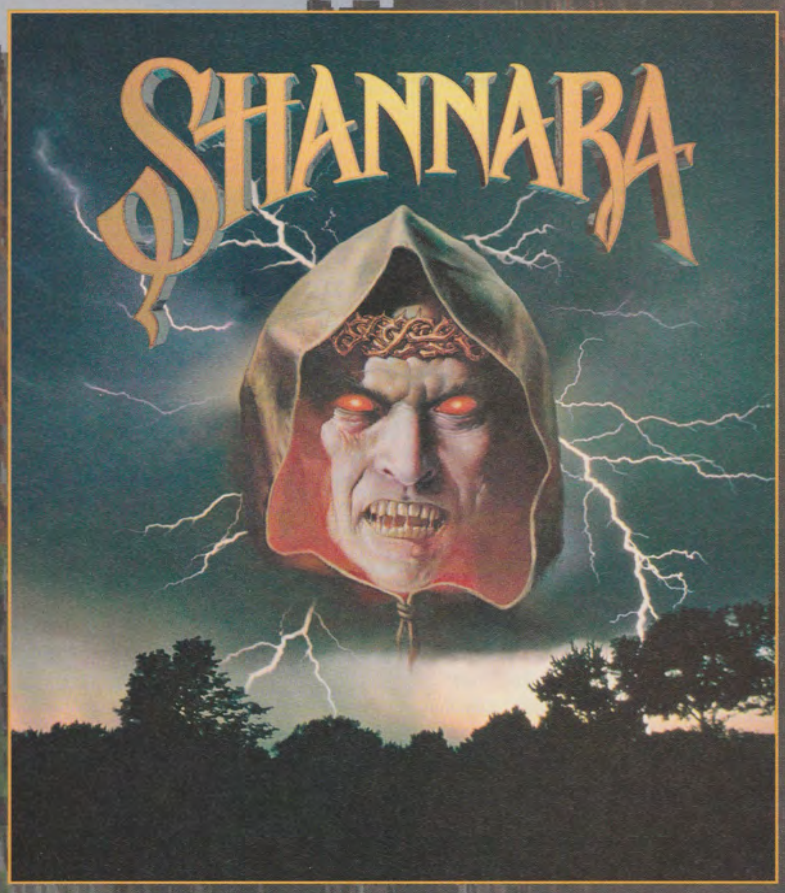
1996 is the 30th anniversary of *Star Trek*. So spurred on by the success of the *Star Trek: The Next Generation CCG* from Decipher, SkyBox is planning to reduce the cast and crew of the original Enterprise to playing card form. At last, the chance to humiliate Captain Kirk and promote Spock!

Star Trek: The Original Series will be released by SkyBox in the Summer.

The Shadowrun CCG?

Another 'game with no name', the *Shadowrun* collectable card game will be FASA's first foray into this huge market. Based, unsurprisingly enough, on the company's cyberpunk-meets-magic roleplaying game, the *Shadowrun CCG* has been ready for release for some time, but is undergoing an extensive period of playtesting to ensure its quality.

The *Shadowrun CCG* will be released by FASA in the Spring.



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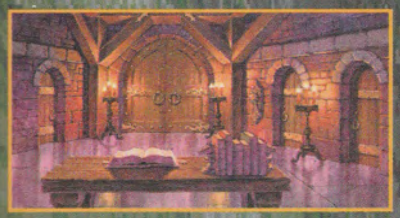

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Setting The World On Fire

Dragon Dice exceeds expectations

DRAGON DICE, THE COLLECTABLE dice game from TSR, is strengthening its claim to be the Next Big Thing. In just two months since its release, it's estimated that half a million packs have been sold worldwide.

Furthermore, retail sources report that stocks of the game temporarily sold out in some areas – suggesting that the figure would have been even higher if TSR's production plant could have kept up with demand.

Last month's **arcane** review awarded *Dragon Dice* a resounding 9/10, so it's reassuring to see the game taking off in such a promising manner.

"Demand has been exceptional", said Andy Seather, TSR's Director of Marketing. "*Dragon Dice* is a phenomenal success and our belief is that it will continue to be so throughout '96, when we start to release the series of kicker packs with new dice and rules additions."

The *Dragon Dice* box set, which costs £6.99, is available from all good game stores. You'd best get your skates on.

Reunification Begins NOW!

win! arcane COMPETITION in association with Titan Books

Fans of ex-Marvel pencilman Jim Lee take heed: the comic series *WildC.A.T.S* which Lee created in collaboration with Brandon Choi, is to get a reissue.

Titan Books has compiled issues 1 to 4 in one softback graphic novel, available now from all good bookshops for the sum of £7.99.

Given that this is the series that the game *WildStorms* (see our review on page 67) is loosely about, these graphic novels are pretty essential reading for all potential players.

Applying our honed blagging skills once again, we've secured 20 copies of the book to give away.

To acquire one of these righteous freebies for yourself, just answer the following question.

Jim Lee achieved fame, fortune and general loveliness through his work on the comics of WHICH team of Marvel superheroes?

Adddress your answers to Who Stole My Ball Of String Competition, arcane, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath, BA1 2BW. The first twenty correct entries drawn from the hat will be declared winners. The closing date is February 30th, 1996. Now, those rules.

1. Multiple entries will be collated and ritually burnt.
2. Employees of Titan Books and Future Publishing should appreciate the futility of entering. We know who you are.
3. The editor's decision is final. For once.

The Ghoul From Ipanema

Roleplaying takes over tax haven

ONE OF THE LARGEST EVER roleplaying conventions was held this summer, drawing over 10,000 enthusiasts. Were you there? Did you even know about it? Probably not, unless you happened to be in Rio at the time.

You may not think of Brazil – yes, where the nuts come from – as a land of die-rolling, card-shuffling fanatics. So think again. In the past six years, the country's active roleplaying scene has witnessed phenomenal growth and is currently one of the largest RPG markets in the world. This year's national games convention was considered important enough to attract high-profile joint sponsorship from Coca Cola (ever the shrewd investor in youth interests) and the Bank of Brazil, and entry was free as a result.

Translations of the *Fighting Fantasy* gamebooks didn't reach Brazil until 1990, but were quickly followed by Brazilian editions of *GURPS* and *Basic D&D*. More recently, *Shadowrun, Magic: The Gathering* and *AD&D* have been welcomed with open maws by a games-hungry audience. The relative infancy and explosive proliferation of the hobby has created odd trends in playing habits: *GURPS* boasts as big a following as *AD&D,* for instance (doubtless because Steve Jackson Games has been providing supporting material in the country since 1991).

Not content to rely on imports, the Brazilians have also been very busy producing their own games. The first, *Tagmar,* was an original fantasy RPG that appeared in 1991: since then, the list of homegrown systems has expanded to meet local demand. *O Desafio dos Bandeirantes* (the Challenge of the Explorers) features historical/mythic adventuring with a South American flavour. The past year has also seen the release of *Monstros,* a humour-led RPG; *Arcanum,* a dark fantasy game; and *Millenia,* predictably devoted to SF and space opera.

But most bizarrely, the sheer novelty of the pastime has allowed it to escape the uncool label that still dogs roleplaying on our own shores. With this in mind, it might be profitable to see how the Brazilian scene develops in the near future.

COMING SOON

Hammer time?

The first Warhammer computer game nears completion

MINDSCAPE IS CURRENTLY PUTTING the finishing touches to the company's latest licence, based on Games Workshop's *Warhammer* games. *Warhammer: Shadow Of The Horned Rat* will be the first in a series of computer games inspired by the successful miniatures rules.

The game casts the player as a mercenary captain seeking fame and fortune by the time-honoured method of selling his services to the highest bidder. Starting with only a couple of regiments, success allows you to gradually build up the forces at your command, which in turn allows you to take on more challenging missions.

Marshall your forces in an effort to defeat the hideous enemy. Or invite them round for tea... you choose.

Of course, things are never as simple as they seem, and as the game progresses the player finds himself caught in the middle of a despicable plot hatched by the forces of Chaos.

The programming team at Mindscape have gone to great efforts to remain true to both the rules and atmosphere of the game, with one notable exception – *Shadow Of The Horned Rat* runs in real time, rather than sticking to the turn-based system of the original. Look out for a full review in the next issue of arcane.

Warhammer: Shadow Of The Horned Rat will be released for the PC and Sony Playstation in December. No price has yet been decided, they tell us.

win! arcane COMPETITION in association with Mindscape and Games Workshop

To celebrate the upcoming release of the world's first *Warhammer* computer game, Mindscape and Games Workshop are offering six copies of the *Warhammer Fantasy Battle* boxed set and *Warhammer: Shadow Of The Horned Rat* game.

To win one of these double prizes, just answer the following questions:

1. What's a Skaven?
2. What is the name of the roleplaying game based in the same world as Warhammer Fantasy Battle?
3. Where are Games Workshop based?

Pop your answers on the back of a post card and send them to: No I Haven't Got an Obligatory Pony-Tail Competition, **arcane** Future Publishing 30 Monmouth Street Bath Avon BA1 2BW
Da Roolz
1. Only one entry per person. We mean it.
2. Employees of Future Publishing, Mindscape and Games Workshop are banned from entering on pain of skewering, under any circumstances.
3. The editor's decisions, while often questionable, are nearly always final.
4. The closing date for entries is 19 January, 1996.

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The Andrew Rilstone Column

Andrew is the editor of *Interactive Fantasy*, the journal of roleplaying and story-making systems, and is also a regular contributor to arcane.

Bright Future – World of Sunshine?

Forget cute hobbits and goody-goody superheroes. Nowadays, it's dark, grim roleplaying games that sell. Cyberpunk worlds where humanity is on the way out and there is nothing you can damn well do about it. Goth-punk campaigns which focus on sinister immortals who look on the human race with contempt. Weird versions of the Bible where the Antichrist wins the battle of Armageddon. Roleplaying is meant to be escapist: why do people find this sort of thing fun?

Cynics say that we're simply dealing with an industrial sized dose of adolescent insecurity. 'Dark' games are the role-playing equivalent of Adrian Mole's poetry. White Wolf's *Wraith* actually has 'angst' as a character attribute! Other people think that these games are popular because they tell the truth: the world really is a grim and horrible place, and there is not much point pretending otherwise. Maybe pretending to be a werewolf, or a werewolf's victim, makes it easier to cope with reading about Bosnia. On the other hand, perhaps the whole thing is nothing more than a fashion statement. Goths are pretty cool, after all, something you could never say about hobbits.

One thing's for sure. Games companies wouldn't be writing these games if people weren't buying them — and people wouldn't buy them if they didn't like pretending to be vampires, immortals, Nephilim and all the rest.

When I was a teenager, I wanted to be Luke Skywalker: learn to be a Jedi knight, fly down the Death Star trench and vanquish the evil empire in the name of the Force. Can it be true that these days, people want to be amoral immortals whose only hope of salvation is to accept and come to terms with their lust for blood? If so, the next century is going to be a pretty grim place to live.

Hey! That gives me a cool new idea for a game...

Andrew Rilstone

FICTION AND FANTASY

It's the biggest thing ever, (well, in Kent)

GAMERS IN THE VICINITY of Kent can look forward to a little more choice on their next shopping spree. A new store called Fiction & Fantasy has just opened its doors, and with 2500 square feet of games spread across two floors it is quite easily the largest RPG and collectables emporium in the whole of Kent.

F&F stocks an impressive line-up of Games Workshop, TSR and FASA games, not to mention a full range of Heartbreaker, Grendel, Mithril and Leviathan miniatures. It's also Kent's centre for the RPGA and runs its own club, providing a playing venue for local gamers. This, as they say, can only be a good thing. Interested parties should get down to...

Fiction & Fantasy, 5/7 Park Street, Ashford, Kent, TN24 8SW

Opening Hours: 10am-7pm weekdays, 9am-7pm Saturdays

...and examine their wares.

The most unusual item we've yet to offer as a competition prize – Data's head can be won by answering a simple question.

All this brings us to a rather special arcane competition arranged in association with Fiction And Fantasy.

To celebrate the opening of this gamer's cornucopia they're giving away an official replica of Commander Data's head, as seen in the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* episode Time's Arrow (it's the one where they travel back in time and – well, Data's head crops up in it quite a bit). Only 500 of these collector's items exist in the world, and their worth is currently estimated at around £200 each. Each one comes with a certificate guaranteeing that it's the genuine article. No shoddy imitation android parts from us, you know.

To win Data's head, answer the following question:
Which contemporary city did the crew of the Enterprise encounter in Time's Arrow?

Send your answers to **arcane,** 30 Monmouth Street, Bath, BA1 2BW. Closing date is 30th February 1996. The following conditions apply:

1. The judge's decision is final.
2. Future Employees and Starfleet personnel are ineligible.
3. Send your answers to us, not to Fiction and Fantasy. And don't even think about multiple entries.

Wizards and Gremlins

ONCE THE HOLY BROTHERS of Illumination have finished working their art with ink and quills, every page of **arcane** is checked for potential errors by clairvoyant seers who test the truthfulness of each word with sulphur and ash. Consequently, we never make mistakes.

However, some copies of **arcane** were clearly subject to tampering by minor gremlins from the third plane of Gehenna. A demonist assassin has been despatched, and we can only apologise to Wizards of the Coast for the unexpected interference by forces beyond our realm of influence.

The correct price of *Everway* should have been printed as £25.95, and if you wish to get in touch with WOTC you should call them on (01345)125599 in the UK or +44 141 226 5205 in Eire.

Furthermore, the prices we printed for the following items should be corrected as follows:

Faeries – £10.99
Cursed Land – £3.99
Tapestries – £7.99

Those pesky Gremlins, eh?
Curse their leathery wings.

COMING SOON

Pan's People

Aleister Crowley meets *Call of Cthulhu*? Oh dear.

Well judging by this there'll be shenanigans aplenty to be had once *Golden Dawn* arrives.

THE GOLDEN DAWN IS a new supplement for *Call of Cthulhu* from Pagan Publishing, due out soon. It will deal with Aleister Crowley's infamous secret organisation, The Golden Dawn (natch), and is set in Victorian London. Crowley was the self-styled anti-christ who gained massive notoriety at the beginning of the century for his dabblings in black magic.

The single volume will be 'big' according to Pagan's owner, John Tynes, and will be a sourcebook with several scenarios. Main areas of interest to the dedicated cultist must be the chapter on the Astral Plane and the rules for incorporating hermetic magic into *Call of Cthulhu* and for creating talismans, wands and other occult paraphernalia. There'll also be a rather useful section on sword-fighting as well as a reprint of the now out-of-print *Cthulhu by Gaslight* character generation rules, enabling you to create fully rounded Victorian Characters.

As well as information on how to be a successful member of The Golden Dawn there will be profiles of other famous occultists of the period including people such as Arthur Macken and the poet, WB Yeats. All of which should tie in very nicely with Chaosium's own planned *London City Sourcebook*.

We froth at the mouth. Our heartbeats are raised in pleasant anticipation. We cannot wait.

Coming to a zoetrope near you...

Space 1889 makes it onto celluloid?

IT HASN'T WORKED for video games, but could a roleplaying game make a decent movie? Independent film company Anders International seems to think so. It's working on a full-length live action feature based on *Space:1889*, the steampunkish blend of interplanetary adventure and Victoriana originally released by Games Designer's Workshop. Scriptwriters Matthew Grove, Ellen Bartok and Christopher Johnson promise stunts, dogfights, love interest and good old-fashioned adventure based on the game's anachronistic premise. Caramba.

Famous for 15 minutes

IN LAST MONTH'S FEATURE we cited a few examples of popular culture that had been infused with the sandalwood scent of roleplaying. And most of it was pretty negative, on reflection. Redressing the balance, Nick Eden (nick@pheasnt.demon.co.uk) recalls a more positive manifestation of the hobby:

"There was a strange programme on BBC2 about five years ago. Various politicians were locked in a room together (best place for them, that's what I say) and fed a story about an international airliner being hijacked at Heathrow. They then decided how the police should respond, who should negotiate with the terrorists and so on. As more information came in, their opinions changed and they tried other ideas. Closest I've ever seen to Roleplaying - The TV Show."

We remember the show but, like you, forget the name. If memory serves, the Gulf War episode saw Trevor McDonald and a team of TV reporters being blown apart by a UN airstrike in the middle of an interview with Saddam Hussein...

Nick wins himself a funky **arcane** T-shirt. The lucky man.

Can you think of any instances in which roleplaying has bubbled to the surface of public consciousness, whether in a book, a film or some other artistic effort?

Write in to us at
15 Minutes, arcane, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW
and be rewarded...

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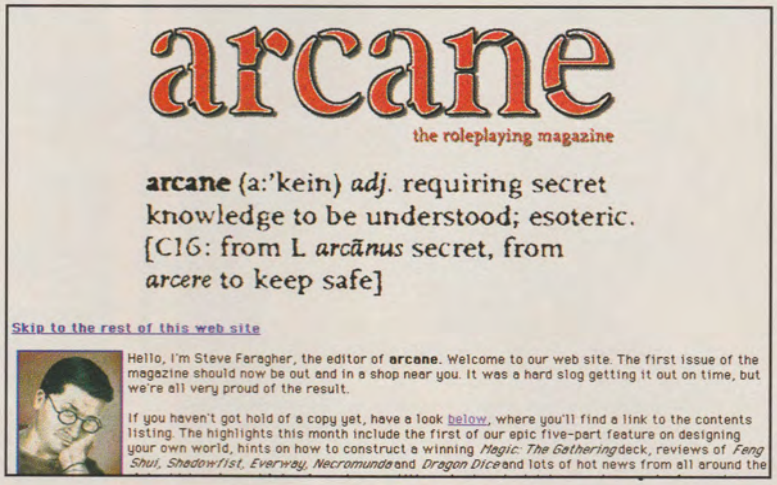
Our regular round up of all things SuperInfoCattleGrid and Internetty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the roleplaying magazine
arcane (a:'kein) adj. requiring secret knowledge to be understood; esoteric. [C16: from L arcānus secret, from arcere to keep safe]
Skip to the rest of this web site
Hello, I'm Steve Faragher, the editor of arcane. Welcome to our web site. The first issue of the magazine should now be out and in a shop near you. It was a hard slog getting it out on time, but we're all very proud of the result.
If you haven't got hold of a copy yet, have a look below, where you'll find a link to the contents listing. The highlights this month include the first of our epic five-part feature on designing your own world, hints on how to construct a winning Magic: The Gathering deck, reviews of Feng Shui, Shadowfist, Everway, Necromunda and Dragon Dice and lots of hot news from all around the

Log on to the arcane home pages and you'll be greeted with that dashing picture of Steve, our editor, that also graces the editorial page. You'll know you're home.

Futurenet, Future's Internet site where our home pages are situated now has a silly password system. We're sorry about that, but please do persevere and get in touch with us.

THE MORE WE DELVE into it, the more we're convinced that the Internet is a roleplayer's paradise. The incredible wealth of gaming information waiting on the other side of that modem is almost overwhelming.

But that's where **arcane** comes in. Whether you're a novice or casual acquaintance of the Internet and thus in need of a guide, or an old hand looking for new places, we're eager to be your wild hog in the truffle-rich field of gaming on the web.

There's an awful lot of good stuff out there, and we want to make sure it gets noticed. If you know or run a site that deserves recognition, tell us about it and we'll add it to our list of links just as soon as the hideous constraints of Old Father Time allow us to.

We're also committed to exploiting the medium for our own ends. If you want to know exactly what that means, then check out our web pages at

`http://www.futurenet.co.uk/`

and take a look. We're currently offering a number of services for roleplayers eager to communicate, including reader ads and contacts, and we think you'll be impressed.

The rest of the site

Issue 1 survey
If you've read issue 1 of **arcane**, tell us what you think of the magazine - you could win a free subscription to the next 12 issues!

The arcane Forum
Share your views on roleplaying - its past, present, future and anything else you feel like talking about - with us and other gamers.

Contacts
Having trouble finding gamers in your area? Our Contacts page is designed to help you get in touch, wherever you live.

Reader Ads
Looking for an out of print Traveller supplement? Want to sell that incredibly rare Magic: The Gathering card you just acquired? Post a message here.

arcane Wants You!
If you're a writer or an artist and you're interested in working for **arcane** as a freelancer, we want to hear from you.

arcane links
Take a look at some of the best sites from all around the world and some of the worst from Norwich.

The first issue of arcane is on sale now in your local newsagent or game store for only £3. If you have any trouble finding it, please e-mail us at arcane@futurenet.co.uk.

The Forum

if you haven't looked at our Forum yet then you're currently missing debates on the subject of realism in games and complex vs. simple systems, among others. It's quite straightforward: when you've read what other contributors have to say, you can post your own opinions for everyone else to read, join in a conversation, start an argument or propose a new topic.

WE ALSO OFFER the following exciting options

The arcane survey - tell us what you thought of arcane and you'll help us to shape future issues. If you think we're not catering for your playing tastes, let us know.

Contacts - our service is designed to put you in touch with other gamers in your locale: look for a club or advertise yourself to an existing group in this space.

Links - The fastest-growing section of our site. Large unwieldy lists of inscrutably named websites can be time-consuming, so besides providing the actual links we also try to give you some indication of what you can expect to find at the other end.

Although it's still in its early stages, **arcane**'s web site is continuously expanding and evolving. Piece by piece we're trying to build the most complete and reliable guide to roleplaying resources on the internet.

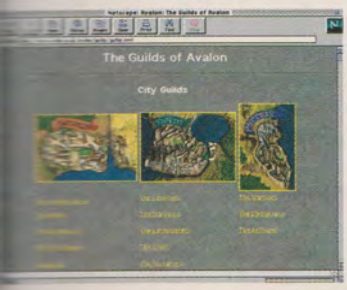
Hot Sites

Where it's at. Whatever it is.

Avalon Roleplaying World

http://www.avalon.co.uk/avalon/

My colleagues on PC Format – closet roleplayers, the lot of 'em – declared this MUD to be "the most complex, atmospheric RPG on the net" and promptly awarded it 90%. But don't let that complexity put you off: if you've

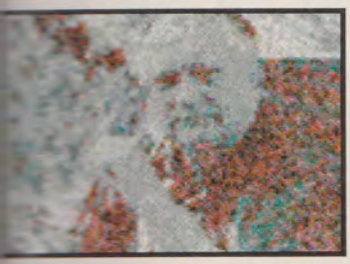


never tried anything like this before, the sheer friendliness of the game puts its rivals to shame. Even before you sign up and skip to the telnet site, the introductory web pages will give you a taste of electronic adventuring. Now in its sixth year, *Avalon*'s strength is the consistency of its gameworld. Not recommended for those who pay their own phone bills...

Jack Vance archives

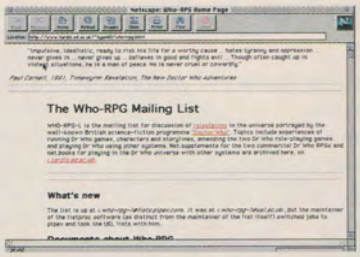
http://www.stack.urc.tue.nl/~remy/jv.html

If those the name means nothing to you, Jack Vance is the author of *The Dying Earth* – the fantasy novel which inspired AD&D's sublimely verbose magic system. This eclectic site charts his career as an SF writer, by way of some truly diverse criticism and thoroughly-researched bibliographies. More for the serious reader than the newcomer, admittedly.



Doctor Who RPG Page

http://www.tardis.ed.ac.uk/~type40/who-rpg.html

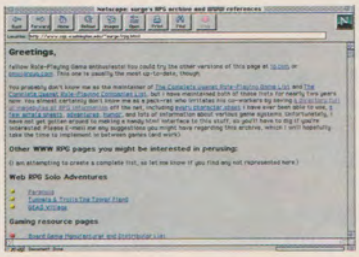


A small, cosy site which takes a generic approach to the topic rather than embracing the old FASA rules, even giving advice on adapting other game systems to incorporate the world of the Time Lords. You'll also find some scenario outlines and a few (sometimes unintentionally hilarious) write-ups that ought to inspire fans of the lovably creaky TV series to consider a session or two of zipping about in the Tardis. Sonic Screwdriver, anyone?

Surge's RPG Archive and WWW References

http://www.cqs.washington.edu/~surge/rpg.html

We're in danger of wearing out the word 'comprehensive', but Surge's lists and links are hard to describe in any other way. Whether you're looking for popular systems, club and company pages, netzines or practically any character sheet ever created then this is for



you. The index alone contains enough surprises to make older gamers point in recognition, sigh wistfully and mutter something about meaning to get into 'that game' again.

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RETRO

MAELSTROM

Alexander Scott Puffin Adventure Gamebooks £1.95
ISBN 0-14-031811-9 First published in 1984 (now out of print)

The first in our new series of great games from yesteryear is *Maelstrom.* An entire RPG for less than two quid? Try telling that to the kids of today.

Alexander Scott was a schoolboy at Eton when he wrote *Maelstrom*. He is now a mathematician at Trinity College, Cambridge.

Last year Alexander Scott met Richard Garfield who we interview on page 25. They met as mathematicians, unaware of the fact that either of them was involved in game design.

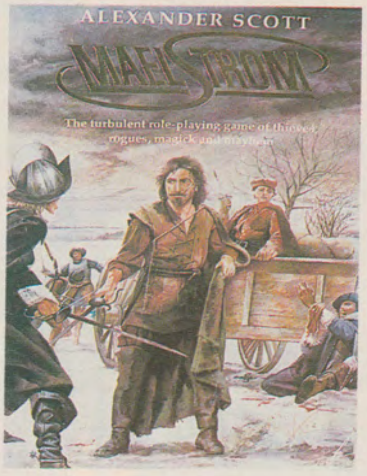
HEY, I WAS YOUNG AND IMPRESSIONABLE, easily led astray by peer pressure. All my mates were doing the stuff, and I wasn't ashamed to be a part of it.

I refer, of course, to the *Fighting Fantasy* solo gamebooks that toppled many a serious author from the best-seller lists of the mid-'80s. There were so many hundreds of cash-in titles at the height of the craze that my local bookstore simply piled them on the floor: it was pure luck that I happened to notice Alexander Scott's *Maelstrom* nestling between Steve Jackson's *Sorcery!* series and Ian Livingstone's *Citadel of Chaos.*

Maelstrom was different: it sneaked out a whole new RPG system in the guise of yet another cheap *FF* paperback. Although one chapter contained a brief solo adventure – presumably to please the publishers – the real purpose of its 300 pages was to present rules, tips and background information for running a roleplaying campaign set in 16th Century Europe. Despite Alexander Scott being a schoolboy when he wrote it, *Maelstrom* had a maturity and inventiveness that eschewed the traditional dungeon monster-bash.

The beauty of *Maelstrom* was its simplicity. Character generation was handled by a point allocation system, and the success of practically any action could be determined by a saving throw against attributes. Professions ranged from priests to mercenaries, scriveners to herbalists; the historical setting emphasised human interaction and intrigue in a Blackadderesque world where plague-scarred rogues lurked around the corner of every ordure-caked street.

Maelstrom's best feature, presented almost apologetically by its author, was a lightly-sketched but intelligent 'magick' system. The book's title referred to a fundamental cosmic force, the universal agent of change that underlies (in an involved Cartesian sense) the real physical world. When a mage invoked the maelstrom he unleashed a power capable of



influencing and even contravening the natural laws of cause and effect. No spells with silly names or mathematical rune matrices here: the mage simply decided what his magic would achieve and the referee would assign a chance of success related to its probability.

Grade 1. The simplest and easiest acts of magick, little things which might happen normally. An assailant slipping on wet cobbles, perhaps, or a torch extinguished by a gust of wind.

Grade 2. Events that could happen by accident but are unlikely, such as a window or doorhandle jamming.

Grade 3. Things that aren't impossible but are nevertheless improbable, such as surviving a night in a blizzard, or causing an assassin's bowstring to snap when pulled taut.

Grade 4. Million-to-one shots. Finding a dagger in the woods when desperate for a weapon, for instance.

Grade 5. Acts contrary to nature – a man flying, a lock turning by itself.

The system wasn't without its faults, most obviously in deciding the likelihood of a desired occurrence: assigning the appropriate grade was always open to argument. In addition, it seems no more impossible to levitate a city than to levitate an egg. But the improbability of success, the mental toll and the society's hostility to magick ("The bride of Satan! Burn her!") forced magick-users to consider the situation from all angles and ply their craft in a subtle, surreptitious manner. Nor was there any guarantee that the spell would work as intended: the maelstrom was implicitly a chaotic energy that could wreak havoc if the caster's will faltered. With sensible refereeing and experienced players, the system held surprising potential and restored to magick its secretive and ambiguous nature without undermining the historical milieu.

Unfortunately *Maelstrom* never received much coverage outside the more discerning fanzines, and I can't help feeling that a certain amount of snobbery with regard to its price and format contributed to its undeserved obscurity. What a shame.

Zy Nicholson

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COMING SOON

INWO Assassins

The first expansion set for Illuminati New World Order...

ILLUMINATI ARE ANCIENT secret societies seeking to control the world by nefarious means. Steve Jackson Games' *Illuminati: New World Order* is the collectable card game of their struggle. Players each take control of an illuminatus and try to build up power networks by taking over other organisations (represented by cards). Money and power are the all important elements of the game and the victor is assured dominance of the world (at least until the next hand is played).

Due out very soon is the first expansion set for *INWO*. Entitled *Assassins*, it features lots of new ideas and groups. The chief new thing will be the 'zap' cards that can be played on other illuminati. These permanently limit the behaviour of an illuminatus until you get rid of them, preventing it from taking over some kinds of organisations, for example. These new cards are designed to be introduced into decks to counter the behaviour of specific opponents. Unlike most card games, players of *INWO* are encouraged to completely overhaul their decks between rounds, so it's easy to see how these zap cards could be very useful fellas indeed.

Other new cards include an entirely new Illuminati Group: The Society of Assassins (bit of a shock, that), some strange new groups including Killer Satellites, Newt Gingrich, and Teddy Kennedy and **arcane**'s favourite, the 'trademark card'. When the trademark card is played on any other card all players are then obliged to always refer to that card by its full and proper name or pay a forfeit. This apparently leads to some hilarious situations, especially if you have the sense to include a few foreign-language cards in your deck. Steve Jackson himself confessed to us that the trademark card is a bit of a dig at some of his 'friends in the industry'.

INWO: Assassins went to the printers in November after the usual delays and should have arrived in the UK generally and the **arcane** office in particular by Christmas. Expect a review next issue.

Nottingham News

BUSY TIMES AS ALWAYS at Games Workshop. Fans of *Necromunda* will no doubt be cheered to hear that the next gang available will be the Delaques. Scheduled for an early January release, they're masters of espionage. So, of course, like any self-respecting spooks, they wear trench coats and shades.

And an SOS message: SAVE OUR SQUATS. Games Workshop games designers apparently admitted to the possible burying of the essential Space Dwarves due to an inspiration bypass. Rather than an apathetic rendition of the diminuitive fellows, as astral Hell's Angels biker gangs, the army has been shelved. So in order to save the short bearded ones, GW have invited anyone who cares to send in their ideas to stimulate a Squat comeback. Games Workshop can be contacted at Chewton Street, Eastwood, Notts, NG16 3HY or on 01773 713213.

Open All Hours

ALSO IN NOTTINGHAM, established fantasy gaming stockist The Trading Post is to open its third branch there. On Saturday December 16th they'll be celebrating their first official day of trading by plying allcomers with competitions, games and special events. Those carefree people at Harlequin Miniatures will be turning up to give away lots of their figures, and you'll have the chance to win a subscription to **arcane** - among other things. The local branch of the RPGA will also be on hand to demonstrate *Dragon Dice*, so if you haven't played anything like this before this is the ideal chance to find out what it's all about.

What's more, if you bring your issue of **arcane** and display it prominently but with dignity you'll be given a special 10% discount on all purchases.

Generously, the Trading Post has agreed to extend this offer to its other two stores on the same day.

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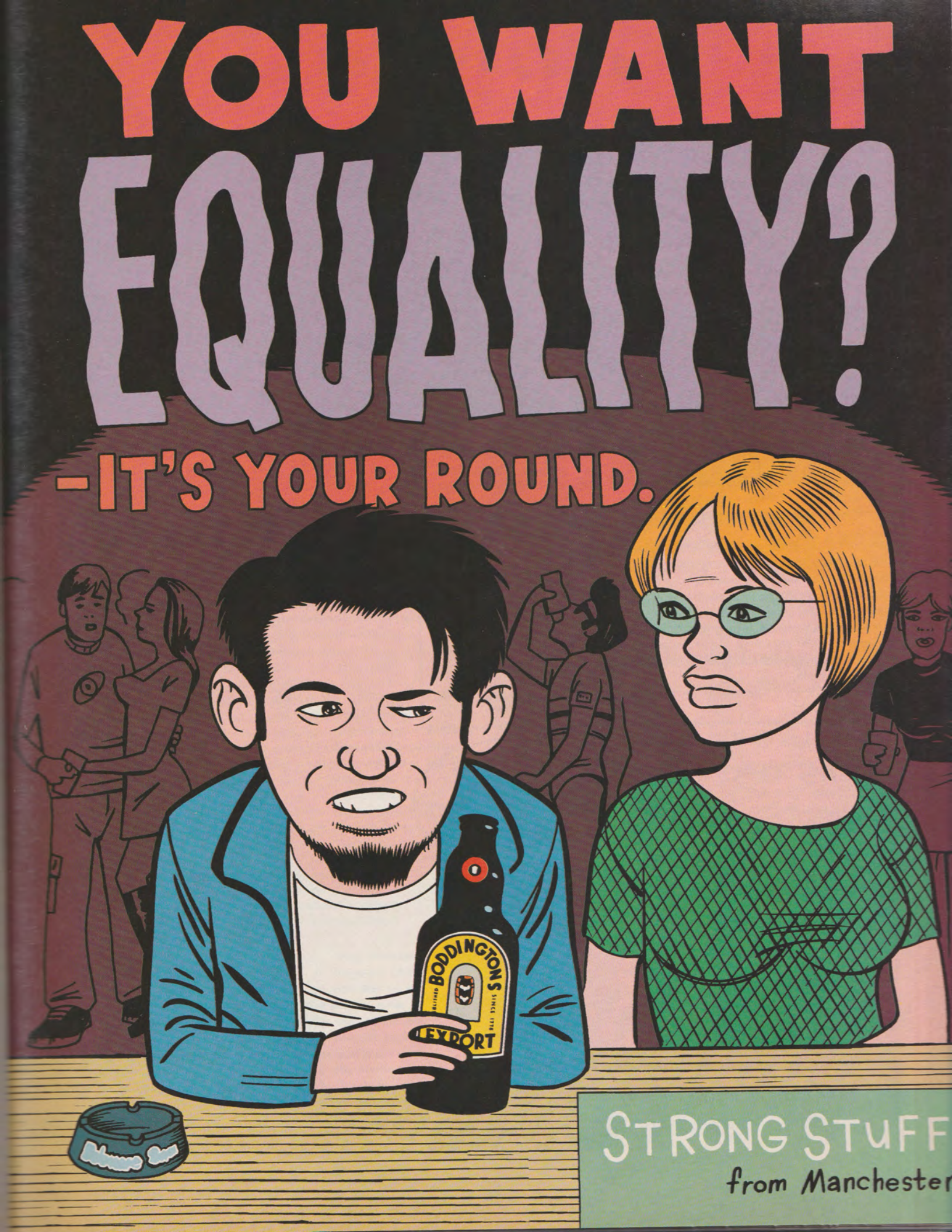
From the director of...

18

"crackling with energy"
The Swine


YOU WANT
EQUALITY?
-IT'S YOUR ROUND.
BODDINGTON'S
EXPORT
STRONG STUFF
from Manchester

COMING SOON

Anvil Of Dawn

The world of Tempest is in need of saving...

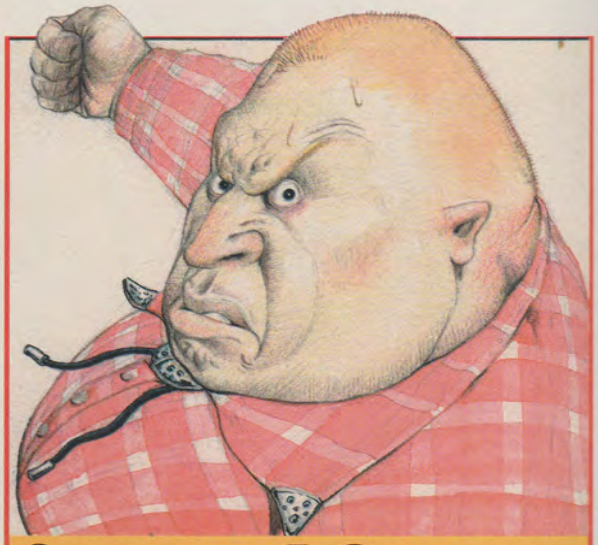
COMING SOON FROM New World Computing, *Anvil Of Dawn* is a fantasy roleplaying game for the PC that casts you as the last hope of the world of Tempest. A hideously evil warlord has arisen, and no army can stand against his sorcerous powers. Before he completes his conquest of the world, you must seek and find a means to defeat him.

Why is it that these first-person persepective games always assume that you've got eyes in your belly?

While *Anvil Of Dawn* certainly isn't going to win any prizes for originality of plot, from what we've seen so far, it might well pick up a couple of honourable mentions for its simple, intuitive interface and well animated graphics. The game uses the now standard first-person perspective 3D view and an elegant rules system based around four statistics and a range of weapon and magic skills. There are five standard characters to choose from, or you can create your own by distributing points between the various stats.

Add in a variety of suitably unpleasant monsters, a range of both interior and exterior locations to explore, and all the usual puzzles and traps, and *Anvil Of Dawn* should certainly provide a pleasant way to while away a few hours. Look out for a full review next issue.

Anvil Of Dawn will be released for the PC by US Gold in December, and will be priced at £39.99.



Seymour J Clancy III's great outing

Once more Seymour pushes a celebrity into the unwelcome spotlight of media attention

Ah have bin spoken to from ON HIGH. Ah have been given a CREWSADE. A crewsade to EXPOSE to public view all the foul and depraved individuals who are sucked into the EVIL NETHERWORLD of the hell-spawned madness that is the game, DENTISTS & DOPE-HEADS.

This month ah am particularly saddened by the REVELATION that the comedian and children's entertainer ROBIN WILLIAMS has been DRAGGED SCREAMING INTO THE FURNACES OF HELL. I refer not to his appearance in drag, but to his flirtation with DOUGHNUTS & DEVILRY which has led to him becoming a player of the filthy and disgusting WARHAMMER 40K, wherein I understand, SMALL VOODOO DOLLS are formed into armies and pitted against each other in a shocking mockery of the FINAL BATTLE. It is terrible that this once fine nation of ours *(Snip – Ed)*

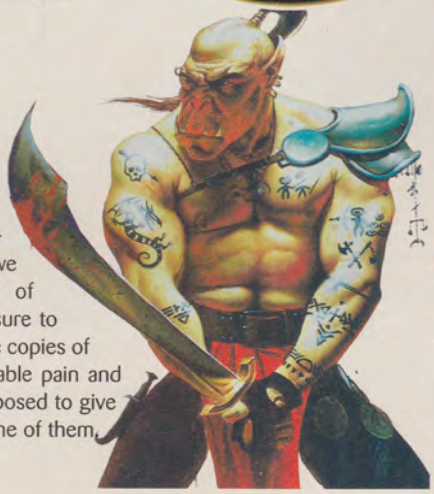
Seymour would like to thank the mysteriously named 'Irish Spy' for his assistance in outing Robin Williams. An **arcane** T-shirt is on it's way now, Irish.

Are there any famous people that you know who enjoy roleplaying or other fantasy games? Seymour has several arcane T-shirts to give away to those of a moral enough nature to expose them to ridicule...

Skills and Powers

win! arcane COMPETITION in association with TSR (UK)

We know a good thing when we see one and Skills & Powers gets our highest accolade – and you can win one!



If you skip to our hearty review on page 60, you'll see that we were very impressed by TSR's new *AD&D* character generation supplement *Skills & Powers*. Indeed, we liked it so much that we awarded it this month's **arcane** seal of approval. So while it gives us great pleasure to announce that TSR has sent us 12 pristine copies of *Skills and Powers*, it causes us considerable pain and hurtage to accept the fact that we're supposed to give them away free to you lot. Every single one of them. Curse you all.

To win your rulebook, just answer the following question:
In which official AD&D world would you encounter a character called Strahd?

Answers should be sent to "That Was Easy Competition", **arcane,** Future Publishing, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath, BA1 2BW before 30th February.

Those Rules:

1. Do you work for TSR or Future Publishing? Then (sob) you'd better abandon all hope of winning.
2. Our editor's decision is final.
3. Multiple entries? Ha ha ha.

Chart Chat

Below you'll find the first **arcane** charts which have been kindly provided for us by Esdevium Games of Aldershot (Tel: 01252 311443), a long-established independent games retailer.
This is not a definitive chart that'll tell you what's selling across the country, but just what's selling in Esdevium and through their mail order. It does throw up lots of interesting and thought-provoking material though. In future issues we'll be hoping to bring you a Virgin chart to go alongside this and show what's selling in the high street.

Games Chart

A fairly quiet month as the big companies gear up their releases towards Christmas, so nothing new for *Vampire, Shadowrun, Battletech, Rifts* or *Cyberpunk* which meant that a wargames magazine like *Command* crept highish up the chart and a *Call of Cthulhu* reprint, *Compact Arkham* (reviewed on page 75) got in. That price is right for *Command*, by the way. They always have a full game in the magazine and on this ocasion it was an add-on for the *Proud Monster* wargame that they did last year. It's good to see that a *Changeling* scenario gets the number one slot and no surprises that *Skills & Powers* has made it high up too.

Card Game Chart

There are two CCG charts. The first shows you how much each individual item is selling and the second shows you which are the top 10 CCGs if you add all starters and boosters sales together.
There's no questioning the superiority of *Magic*, with the *Homelands* boosters being the top seller by a clear margin. However, *Ice Age* and *Chronicles* expansions were in very short supply last month...
Also suffering from poor availability were *Marvel Overpower* (reviewed on page 66) and *Guardians*, both of which would have done much better in the chart had there been any available.
It's good to see that the excellent *Shadowfist* (8/10, **arcane** 1) made a healthy showing . We're frankly surprised to see *Wing Commander* in there though. We'd better go and buy some and see what all the fuss is about. Incidentally, if you're wondering what the *Star Trek* Factory set is, it's one of every *Star Trek: TNG* card in a tin box and costs £81. Or cost rather. Apparently, they've already sold out.

Games Chart

1	**Immortal Eyes: Toybox** *(Changeling RPG scenario)* *White Wolf*	**£5.99**
2	**AD&D Players' Options: Skills & Powers** *TSR*	**£11.99**
3	**Taint of Madness** *(Call of Cthulhu sourcebook)* *Chaosium*	**£12.95**
4	**Command Magazine 34 – Death & Destruction**	**£23.95**
5	**Unholy Allies** *(World of Darkness Fiction)* *White Wolf*	**£3.50**
6	**Kult RPG** *Metropolis*	**£13.95**
7	**Compact Arkham Unveiled** *Chaosium*	**£12.95**
8	**Regency Sourcebook** *(Traveller) GDW*	**£11.99**
9	**Galaxy Guide 12 – Enemies & Allies** *(Star Wars)* *West End*	**£9.95**
10	**Worlds Without End** *(Shadowrun novel) FASA*	**£2.99**

Collectable Card Game Chart

1	**Magic Homelands Boosters**
2	**Magic 4th Edition Starters**
3	**Magic 4th Edition Boosters**
4	**Star Trek Boosters**
5	**Rage Umbra Boosters**
6	**Star Trek Starters**
7	**Star Trek Factory Set**
8	**Shadowfist Limited Edition Boosters**
9	**Wing Commander Limited Boosters**
10	**Wing Commander Limited Starters**

Collectable Card Games by system

1	**Magic Homelands Expansion**
2	**Magic 4th Edition**
3	**Star Trek**
4	**Rage**
5	**Wing Commander**
6	**Sim City**
7	**Shadowfist**
8	**Highlander**
9	**Guardians**
10	**Spellfire**

arcane
The roleplaying magazine

We reveal exclusive details of the MAGIC The Gathering™ roleplaying game and talk to one of the designers.

"Can I help you?" asks Mr Smith, proprietor of a trans-dimensional corner shop (no, really) in our third extraordinary encounter.

We ask whether good acting gets in the way of good roleplaying in our controversial feature.

Things really hot up in the wordbuilding arena with the introduction of the ultimate evil... mankind.

We give R Talsorians's Cyberpunk follow up, CyberGeneration, the arcane treatment by shining a bright light in it's eyes.

And we review buckets of other new stuff including Mage: The Ascension 2nd edition from White Wolf, the revised Dark Sun campaign setting for AD&D, Tech Readout 3058 for Battletech, Virtual Realities 2 for Shadowrun, the Netherworld expansion for Shadowfist and loads more...

On sale Thursday 18th January 1996

DESTINY LIES IN THE HANDS OF THE FEW IN

Crusade

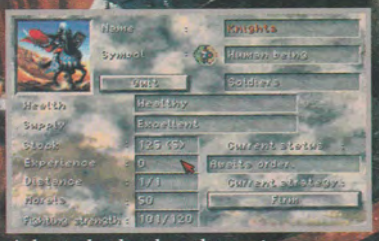
The destiny of your homeland is in your hands in this stunning strategy game. If you are successful in completing your tasks you will be taking over the reign of the kingdom, but should you fail, the executioner will show no mercy.

No other game features such unparalleled realism with live sequences and rendered scenarios accompanying an intuitive interface. Features include:

- Up to four players
- Alliance forming capability
- Digitised sound and speech
- Integrated scenario and units editor

Intuitive control via graphic icons.

Atmospheric scenarios.



Adapted role play elements.

You're on your way to the throne...

For Ages ~ Pour Ages ~ Para Años ~ Für Jahre ~ Per Anni
3-10 X 11-14 ✓
15-17 ✓ 18+ ✓
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The Man Who Killed Roleplaying?

Photography: Rob Scott

No single occurence has shaken the roleplaying world as much as the appearance of Magic: The Gathering. Love them or hate them, collectable card games have changed the face of gaming. If any single person can be held responsible, it's Richard Garfield, the inventor of the first collectable card game. Andy Butcher asked him how he feels about his creation two years on...

So far, over a billion *Magic: The Gathering* cards have been sold worldwide – which adds up to a lot of players. Did you ever in your wildest dreams expect that the game would be so successful?

No, it's certainly been successful way beyond my expectations. It would have to be – you'd have to be an incredible egotist to have expected what happened. It surprised me as much as anyone. →

← How good did you think *Magic* was?

I thought it was a really cool game, it was a lot of fun, and if I wasn't mistaken, it could be a new genre, sort of like coming up with the first board game.

My original plan of attack was to target people like me, who like to play games. People who play games as a hobby, perhaps roleplay but don't have time to really get everybody together.

That's what it was built for – and for conventions, to play while people are waiting in line. Then after a few years of this, if the game was looking successful, I would redesign it and make it into a mass-market game – something which would appeal to kids and people who didn't want to delve into complex rules.

Its success killed that idea. *Magic* went to kids without our rewriting it significantly and it sort of amazed everybody. It's certainly proved to be a new form of game, and it's not something I can ever expect to do again. I don't think anybody can really expect that sort of thing once, let alone twice.

"I don't think or believe that Magic has in any way harmed the hobby. It might temporarily take the spotlight, but in the long run I think it will do good – getting people who didn't play games before interested, and clearing out some of the garbage that is out there."

Do you regret that *Magic* became so successful so fast?

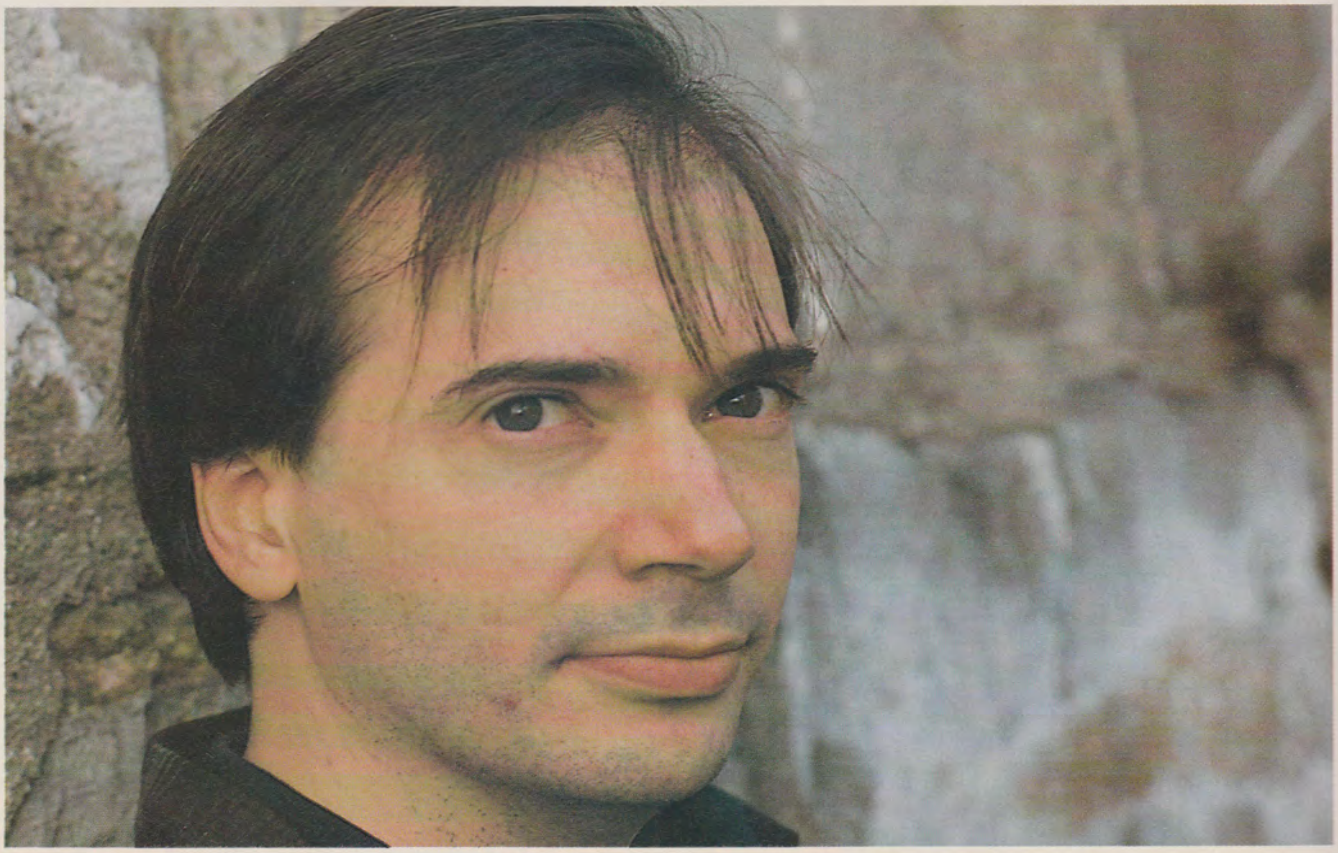
No (grins). There are things about the game, perhaps, that I regret. I worked on *Magic* for two years before it came out, but the first time it was really playtested was when it was released. Clearly we did a reasonable job with the playtesting, but you always hope to do a little better.

I have learned a lot about trading card games in the last few years, and it would have been nice to get a chance to have it out there for a while and then reconstruct it based on everything I have learned, rather than have the prototype become the 'Model T'.

Recently there's been something of a backlash against card games, especially amongst roleplayers. How do you feel about this?

My love of games is a love for the hobby as a whole. When I say 'gaming' it's actually a very encompassing term. A lot of people assume that because of my position, I mean card games – or fantasy games if they're being generous – but I actually do mean all games, from backgammon and poker to roleplaying.

I don't think or believe that *Magic*



has in any way harmed the hobby. It might temporarily take the spotlight, but in the long run I think it will do good – getting people who didn't play games before interested, and clearing out some of the garbage that is out there.

As a consumer I was getting bored with the game industry for a while – I just wasn't seeing any new ideas. Every six months I would go to the store with my 30 or 40 dollars ready to spend it – I didn't have much money as I'm a graduate student, but this is my hobby, right? And each time I went the number of selections was going down.

You know, there were times when I would go there and I was choosing between the things that were the least offensive or the least bad. That's where my games designing has always come from – my appetite has always been larger than what was on offer.

So, since the vast success of *Magic*, do you find it intimidating to sit down and design new games?

Not really. I've certainly accepted the fact that I am not going to design another *Magic* – or at least that it will be just as improbable for me to do it as for anybody else, maybe even more improbable because somebody else would naturally come at things from a different angle.

I did feel with *Jyhad* that I had to make it very different just to help establish trading card games as being something more than just versions of *Magic*. It turned out that I didn't have to do that – I was actually very surprised at the variety in the card games that came out in the year after *Magic* was released. I expected them to be much closer to *Magic* for quite a while, but the expected rip-offs didn't really come until this year.

So I don't feel like I have anything to prove with my game designs now. I just try to do what interests me. I spend a lot of my time thinking about very abstract aspects of games design – like what makes a good game, what makes people want to play again and again, and how to distinguish a good game from good players – stuff like that.

A vast secondary market has sprung up around *Magic* cards, with some being valued at hundreds of dollars. Did you expect this to happen?

No, actually I didn't. I saw some value in the cards – one of the birthplaces of *Magic* was spending a lot of time in game and hobby shops, and they often have comic books and trading cards. These cards were fascinating – you'd have movie cards and comic cards and serial killer cards and whatever.

They always seemed frustrating to me, though, because it seemed like you should be able to do something with these things that looked so good and had such a nice theme. I don't know, I just didn't see the point. On the other hand, if you could do something with them, like play a game, I thought that there'd be something special about the collecting part.

Anyway, I expected the cards to be printed and for them to be like comic books, where if the game was successful, then in a few years these cards would be worth something. I certainly didn't expect anybody to collect a full set.

I was actually very surprised when the first full set was collected, as I knew it would be a very hard thing to collect – it was deliberately made difficult because I thought it would increase the game value. I thought it was cool that as long as you played it there would always be things out there that you didn't know about. To see people turn that on its head and say 'we're just going to work toward everything' was shocking to me.

Have you got a complete set of *Magic* cards yourself?

No. I have got a lot of cards, but from the start I asked that nobody on the project team be given a complete set. I wanted them to be in touch with the consumer, and as I said I didn't expect anybody to collect a complete set. I wanted the people involved with the game to sort of share that frustration so that they would know whether it was worth it or not.

I figured that if I could take it anybody could take it, which is a little bit of a lie because I have so little connection with collectors. That's why I don't have a complete set, but I've got enough cards. I could probably trade for one if I wanted to. I don't know.

How do you feel about the people who spend – or make – huge sums of money on *Magic* cards?

People who are collecting for their own purposes – they want to buy this thing and have this collection, I can understand that. People who are buying to turn around and sell them in a month or year, that's also understandable but its something I don't want to encourage.

I think that people who do stuff like that are a different breed in some ways. Sure, it's an economic reality, it's going to happen and complaining about it is pointless, but we can change our card printing strategies in order to minimise it. And that is what we are doing, because I think that people ought to be able to go into the store and get *Magic* and play it – it's a game.

So how are you doing that?

Well, we're experimenting with *Ice Age*, which is being printed for a year. That way it's something that is limited by time, but not by numbers. I want to see people's cards get valuable, but I think it should be over years and not over days. I think *Magic* will burn out if it continues to be over days, just because there is always so much abuse. Having to spend $200 for a card or something is ridiculous.

Some people think that card games are a fad. Do you think *Magic: The Gathering* will last?

Yes. I don't know whether it will carry on being able to support four expansions a year or something like that, but *Magic* has a huge amount of game value. My main thing is variety – I advocate playing a large variety of games. But *Magic* has a lot of variety right inside it, and I find I can return to it often and still find lots of new ways to play.

The official *MTG* World Championship was held in Seattle in August this year. It boasted 71 participants from an amazing 19 different countries. The winner was Alexander Blumke from Switzerland.

Richard Garfield is currently working on *Netrunner*, the collectable card game based on R Talsorian's *Cyberpunk 2020*.

"I don't feel like I have anything to prove with my game designs now. I just try to do what interests me. I spend a lot of my time thinking about very abstract aspects of games design."

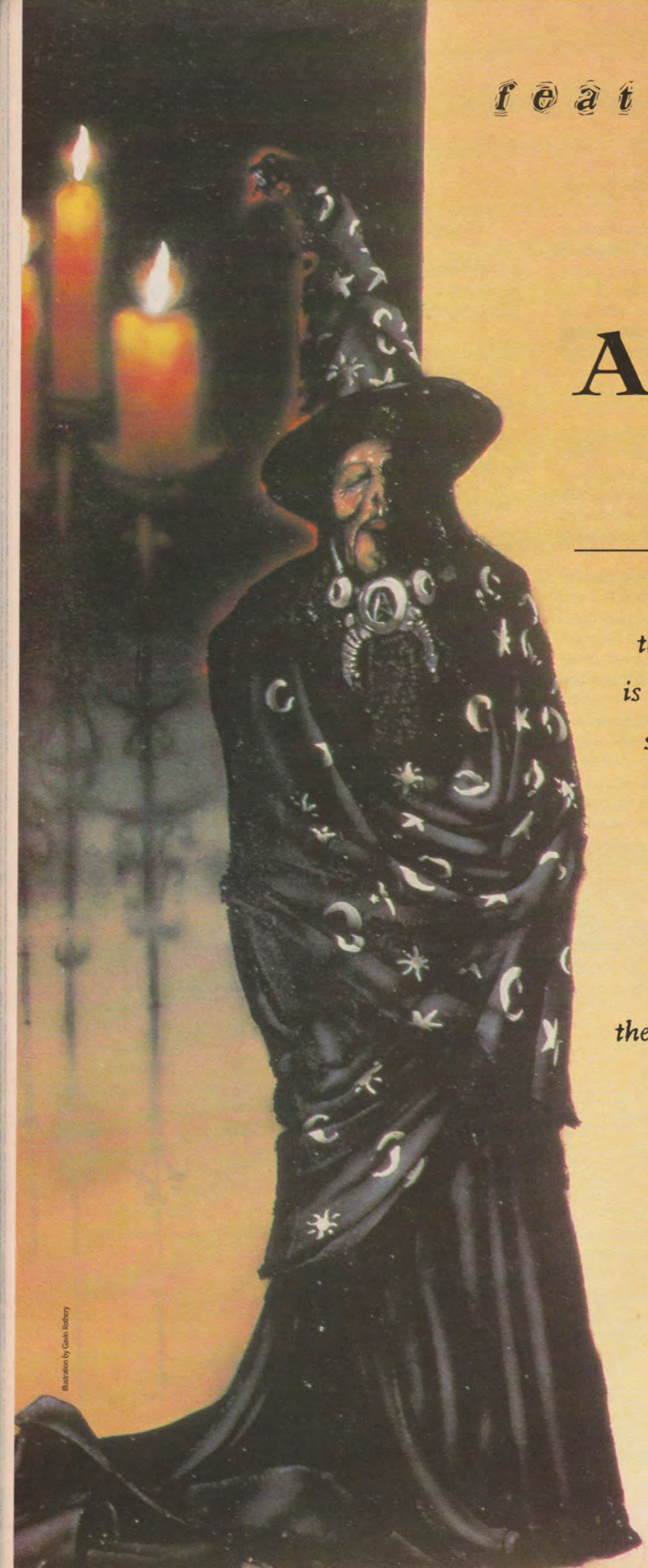


Illustration by Gavin Rothery

Break T
Archetypes
and Clich

You are sitting in a darkened corner of the tavern, listening to the tall, blond elf who is strumming his harp and singing a beautiful song about the forests. Two drunken orcs are yelling cuss-words at him. An old man in a grey robe comes up to your table. "'Tis well that you have come here, friend," he says. "For this land is sore oppressed by a grievous dragon, and only he who wields the golden rune-sword can slay it." "I'm sorry," you say: "Haven't I been here before?"

After much debate in the office about what 'stereo' means, we looked it up. It's Greek and means 'solid'. As in three-dimensional. Like stereo music. The word 'stereotype' comes from a method of producing cast-metal printing plates from a mould made from a form of type. So now you know.

Somewhere in the world, there is probably an Irishman named Paddy who drinks Guinness, works on a building site and starts every sentence with the words "To be sure". Maybe he lives on the same street as a stuck-up Englishman and a policeman who says "Hello, hello, hello! What's all this, then?"

But if there are people like that, you don't often meet them. They are literary conventions, caricatures – or stereotypes. Writers and film-makers know that they can't fill books and films with stereotyped

Mould!
Stereotypes s in RPGs

characters, so why is it referees think that they can get away with this sort of thing in roleplaying games? Wizards are always old men with long, white beards; orcs swear and talk with cockney accents; kingdoms are ruled by wise kings with beautiful daughters; and evil magicians always live in towers.

If roleplaying games are meant to be as limitless as our imagination, why do we find it difficult to imagine a dwarf who doesn't care about treasure, or an ugly elf who is useless at singing and archery?

So What, Exactly?

'Okay', you're thinking: 'We get the gist! Stereotypes are A Bad Thing and we should strive for originality at all costs.'

Well, actually, no. Some stereotypes have been around for a long time. Writers wouldn't have used them over and over again if they didn't have merit.

Do you remember the beginning of David Eddings' *Belgariad* series of books, when the mysterious old wizard Belgareth (stereotype 1) visits starry-eyed orphan farm boy Garion (stereotype 2) and tells him about his destiny. Garion says to Belgareth (stop me if you've heard this one before): "How did my father die?"

The reason David Eddings got away with this – and kept on getting away with it, book after book – is that he used ideas that have gone beyond mere stereotypes and become archetypes. An archetype is a character or situation that carries a very powerful emotional charge precisely *because* it has been used so many times – or maybe it has been used so many times because it carries an emotional charge.

The term 'archetype' was invented by a psychologist, Carl Jung, who thought that certain characters – like the Wise Old Man, or the Trickster – were hard-wired into our brains from birth. You don't need to believe this to know that using archetypal themes can make scenarios pack a powerful punch.

If the player characters in your campaign trek across half a continent to reach the Castle of Ultimate Darkness and kill the Dark Lord on his Dark Throne with the Dwarf-Sword of Extreme Niceness, then everyone is going to be far too gob-smacked to notice that this particular plot has already been used in seventeen or eighteen fantasy novels.

If the PCs kill a Dark Lord every week, or rescue 16 identical princesses from 16 indistinguishable dragons, these will stop being powerful archetypes and turn into boring clichés. Your job as a referee is to know the difference.

Stereotypes — Better Than Nothing At All

If you are not aspiring to the dizzy heights of archetypal themes, then the humble stereotype can still come in handy when you are depicting minor characters – and when you are short of ideas.

Roleplayers sometimes create hugely detailed life-stories and backgrounds for their player characters. But then, players have only got one character each to worry about – the harassed referee has dozens.

Realistically, you aren't going to get immense detail into every NPC in a game. Stereotypes can be a kind of shorthand, a way of sketching characters who are not sufficiently important to get the full treatment. Let's say you want the →

PCs to get into a fight with a couple of thugs, so you give a quick description:

'There are two rough, unshaven men standing by the door. One has a half-empty bottle in his hand.

"What yer looking at, nancy-boy?" says one of the roughs.

"Want me to work him over for you?" says the other.'

An appalling pair of stereotypes, but then they are going to be unconscious in the gutter in three melée rounds' time. But even a one-dimensional personality is better than no personality at all. Some referees would have just said 'Two 2nd level fighters attack you'. Not really very evocative, is it?

Suppose you are really stuck for a sub-plot. The PCs are staying in a village in the middle of nowhere, and you can't think of a scenario. Well, what do you find in villages? Peasants. What is the stereotypical peasant like? Superstitious, gullible, and likely to join a crowd carrying torches and pitchforks. So, what is happening when the PCs reach the village? The stereotyped village priest (well-meaning, narrow-minded, fanatical) has decided that a stereotyped old lady (lives by herself with a cat and a spinning wheel) is a witch, and encouraged the superstitious mob to make a big bonfire for her…

What will the PCs do?

Is that the most original plot idea you have ever heard? No: every single element in it is a stereotype. Could you get away with doing it every week? Definitely not. But a stereotyped situation is better than no plot at all.

Danger: Clichés At Work

Some stereotypes just turn into clichés. They get so well-known that you simply can't use them if you want your game to have any element of surprise in it.

If the PCs are forced to spend the night in a run-down gothic manor, don't expect them to be surprised when the ghostly chains start clanking. And if the manor turns out to be the home of a nobleman with a funny accent who says that he never drinks... wine, *definitely* don't expect anyone to be amazed when he turns out to be a vampire.

A referee can get away with murder on one condition: the players have to be able to believe in what is going on. A mob of torch-wielding peasants may be a Hollywood cliché, but the first time the players come across it, they will probably take it at face value.

The trouble comes when you hear a character say 'Oh look, a village: I wonder who the peasants will be burning this time?' If all tavern keepers are fat and jolly and every cave in the kingdom is the home of a dragon, then your game has gone wrong. It has turned into a cartoon, a sort of Disneyland. No one takes it seriously any more.

The Society for the Preservation of Elderly Stereotypes

Does this mean that there comes a time when you have to give up using stereotyped characters and start being

Arcane's Top Fantasy Stereotypes

Dwarf
Quiet, moody, bad tempered. Loves fighting and gold. Misses the mountains. Hates orcs.

Orc
Loud, vulgar, bad-tempered. Loves fighting and beer. Hates Dwarves

Elf
Beautiful, noble, artistic. Loves music and archery. Misses the forest. Hates dwarves and orcs.

King
Wise old man, white-haired. Was warrior in his youth. His people love him.

Knight
Holy, pious, always ready to help a damsel in distress. Shining armour.

Peasant
Says 'Oo, arr'. Suspicious of 'furreners'. Narrates local folklore ('Oo, arr, yonder tower, they do say it be havin' a huge treasure in its dungeons, oo, arr').

ARCANE's Top Sf Stereotypes

Starship Captain
Runs the best ship in the fleet. Loved by crew. Agonizes, but always makes the best decision.

Starship Pilot
Young, good looking, idealistic, brash. Inexplicably attractive to the opposite sex. Flies 'by the seat of his pants' (whatever that means.)

Inscrutable and/or god-like alien
Looks like human with luminous make-up, or blob of jelly. Says 'Can it be you primitives still fight wars?' or 'What is this human emotion called love?'

Corporate Boss
Wears sharp suit. Carries laptop. Frighteningly rich. Callous, corrupt, scheming, and completely immoral.

Child
Brattish goody-goody. Always either a computer genius or a telepath.

Alien monster
Large, deadly, inhumanly fast, immune to weaponry. Humans are the perfect host for its parasitic lifestyle, even though it's never come into contact with them before.

(heaven forbid) *original*? Not necessarily. There are ways and means of breathing life into even the hoariest clichés.

1: Individualise the Stereotype

If your PCs are going to fight three blood-thirsty, cannibalistic trolls, then try to give one of them a little quirk, even if it's only an eye-patch or an unusual weapon.

Perhaps one of the trolls has stolen a fashionable woman's dress and doesn't realise how stupid he looks? Or maybe he has a pet Marsh Monster he's fond of? Little twists like this can fool players into thinking that trolls have an off-stage life.

If you do this, you should beware of 'the cheese effect'. This is what happens when a referee invents some quirk for the character, such as the fact that he likes Stilton cheese. This has no relevance to anything in the game, but it doesn't stop the NPC mentioning it every chance he gets. 'Forsooth! Let us go forth and joust with Dark Knight. Then let's go back to the pub for a cheese sandwich.' This doesn't make the PC more believable: it just makes the referee look stupid.

2: Contradict the Stereotype

If orcs are vulgar and bad-tempered, then have a soft-spoken one who likes poetry. If knights have shining armour and rescue maidens in distress, then introduce one who is a murderer and a rapist. Put the fat hobbit on a diet, or make the grey-bearded king a corrupt tyrant.

Once players have been caught off-balance by this, they will be much less willing to take stereotypes at face value in the future. In this case, you should beware of 'the Agatha Christie effect'. Everyone knows that in a bad whodunnit, the inoffensive old lady who had no possible motive and in any case wasn't there at the time will turn out to be the murderer. It's meant to be a surprise twist; it's actually utterly predictable. If all characters who look good turn out to be bad, and all apparently bad characters turn out to be good, then you have created a new stereotype every bit as boring as the old one. Like all good ideas, this one only works occasionally.

3: Invert The Stereotype

Is there any good reason why the PCs can't be hired by a dragon who needs someone to guard his treasure from the dishonest wizard who wants to steal it? Or, just for a change, couldn't the head of a corporation in a cyberpunk game be an honest man who runs an ethical business and gives money to charity? Maybe his work is being jeopardised by a cynical computer hacker?

Simply taking a well-known cliché and turning it back on itself can provide a breath of fresh air so long as you only use it once in a blue moon. More often than that, and you end up with one of those dreadful books that Politically Correct parents buy for their kids, in which bold princesses rescue wimpish knights...

The only way to know which ideas work for you is to try them out. Keep in mind that you are an exceptionally bright, imaginative person, and that the players in your group are all nerdish computer programmers who have never read a book that isn't by Terry Pratchett.

Sorry – that's just another damnable stereotype. Isn't it?

Fanzines

They're everywhere...

This hobby of ours is extraordinarily broad, from roleplaying to card games, miniatures, live action, play-by-mail or board games. Amidst all this variety, if you want to try something new, one of the best places to start can be a fanzine. Cheap, accessible, enthusiastic. And ideal if you have a specialised interest, too.

This is our first irregular round-up of what fanzines are out there, what they cover, who they're by and where you can get hold of them. If you run a fanzine yourself, or know of one that we haven't covered, let us know at the usual address. We'll be doing this again in the future.

SUMO'S KARAOKE CLUB

A5 76pp £2.95 Quarterly

Coverage: board games, card games and strategic computer games

A well-known and well-written amateur magazine that is respected by gamers for its direct attitude towards the games it reviews. Many board games, particularly imports from Germany, are sold on the strength of a *Sumo* review. The publisher, Mike Siggins, isn't afraid to print what he sees as the truth. The mag appears at irregular intervals (about four times a year) and varies in size accordingly.

Available from: Mike Siggins, 129 Ardmore Lane, Buckhurst Hill, Essex IG9 5SB

FOR WHOM THE DIE ROLLS

A5 20pp 30p plus postage

Coverage: play-by-mail

This is a very clear and clean magazine devoted to play-by-mail gaming. It runs several games itself

including *Rail Baron, Railway Rivals* and *Snakes & Ladders.* These games are open for anyone to join, and on top of all this, the magazine also offers advice and ideas on how other games can be transformed for play-by-mail.

Available from: Keith Thomasson, 14 Stepnells, Marsworth, Nr Tring, Herts HP23 4NQ

THE IDES OF MARCH

A4 52pp £1.00 Every four weeks

Coverage: postal *Diplomacy*

Held together by one cock-eyed staple in the top left corner, this is a collection of *Diplomacy* game and competition news that is heavily supplemented with a lively letters column concerned with just about everything ever discussed in a pub. It's of value mainly only to PBM *Diplomacy* players, though the humour that runs throughout its packed pages make it an interesting and imaginative read.

Available from: Chris Palm, 45 Cecil Avenue, Ardleigh Green, Hornchurch, Essex, RM11 2NA

VIGILANTE

A5 56pp Free

Coverage: Roleplaying

An amateur magazine that is pushing hard to achieve professional status by combining a glossy cover with shiny interior printed pages. The magazine is now on to its third issue, and each new one has proven to be a great improvement on the previous one. Surprisingly good layout is combined with a heavy emphasis on the White Wolf *World of Darkness* games. This is a compelling read. Send off for one.

Available from: Richard Mosse, Kilfane Cottage, Thomastown, Co. Kilkenny, Ireland.

Send an SAE with two International Reply Coupons (available from the Post Office).

FLAGSHIP

A4 48pp £3.00 Every two months

Coverage: play-by-mail

While *Vigilante* is getting slicker and more professional by the issue, *Flagship* is as close to a professional publication as a fanzine can possibly get and still remain a fanzine. It is slick, clean, and extremely useful for anyone who is remotely interested in play-by-mail games. (Although every issue does include several relatively trivial pages of tidbit information on topics other than PBM, in a generous attempt to accommodate readers from outside the PBM field, this is still predominantly a play-by-mail mag). Living up to its high standards of presentation, *Flagship*'s publishing policy is equally well-thought-out and professional – the magazine is available in separate editions for the the US, UK, and Europe. Very fancy.

Games are always reviewed by extremely experienced players and reported on in a manner that is both constructive and intelligent. If you're interested in beginning to play in or operate a play-by-mail game of any type, read an issue or two of *Flagship* first. It could save you a lot of money and frustration later on.

Available from: Flagship, PO Box 39, Exmouth, Devon EX8 1YR

LIFE'S RICH PAGEANT

A5 92pp £1.00 + postage Every six weeks

Coverage: play-by-mail

Now this is what you call a real fanzine. Produced every six weeks, apparently in two halves, by the very dedicated duo of Kim Head and Louise Auty, it covers the play-by-mail games that they run – which include *Braking Away* (cycling), *Executive Decision, En Garde* and *Diplomacy* – as well as the familiar blend of readers' letters and comments. Overall this is a commendable grassroots fanzine that simply bubbles with enthusiasm.

Available from: Kim Head, 23 Higher Efford Road, Efford, Plymouth, Devon PL3 6LB

PBM ZINE

A4 60pp £1.50

Coverage: play-by-mail (again...)

The amateurish look of the cover belies the professionalism of production and presentation of the pages inside this magazine: but that's where the dissimulation stops, since the title gives you a more than fair impression of what you can expect the contents to be like. *PBM Zine* is a little less finished than *Flagship*, but it is otherwise an incredibly well written advice and reviews magazine for play-by-mail gamers. *PBM Zine* offers good, topical news and review coverage of most aspects of the subject matter, and really only falls down in its annoying habit of placing vital addresses in panels where the background colour is darker than the text.

Available from: Jamie Lang, 53 Scott Road, Pitsmoor, Sheffield S4 7BG

ONE MAN'S RUBBISH

A4 24pp £1.00 (50p to unwaged) Monthly

Coverage: play-by-mail

'One man's rubbish is another man's unmissable reading matter' is, you might imagine, what the title is getting at, and it could be true. At £1.00 for its 24 pages, *OMR* is a little expensive, particularly when you find that it really does not have any content of sufficient interest to make it worth buying regularly. However, this issue did provide a few particles of hobby information and a couple of smiles.

Most of the gaming content is for regular readers and/or those already involved in the mag's up-and-running PBM activities. *OMR* is another PBM-based 'zine that includes the odd review of a game that has no apparent links with play-by-mail gaming; in this case the German card game *Hol's der Geier*.

Available from: Mark Stretch, 25 Woodside, Badger Lane, Hinksey Hill, Vale of White Horse, Oxfordshire OX1 5BL

GAMES GAMES GAMES

A4 £1.95 28pp Monthly

Coverage: all games

Originally titled *Small Furry Creatures Press*, the magazine now known for short as *G3* actually changed its name so that it would be more acceptable to retail outlets and more accessible to games players not already familiar with it. Like *Sumo, G3* is a magazine that has built up a reputation as an oracle of advice and reviews for gamers, and has also become known and trusted by British and European boardgames distributors and publishers. As well as the ubiquitous play-by-mail games, roleplaying and boardgaming co-exist alongside more 'ordinary' pastimes such as Go, chess and Mah Jong. Issues often include mini-quizzes and fun participation games.

Available from: Small Furry Creatures Press, 42 Wynndale Road, London E18 1DX

GAMES GAZETTE

A4 32pp £7.50 six-issue subscription Every two months

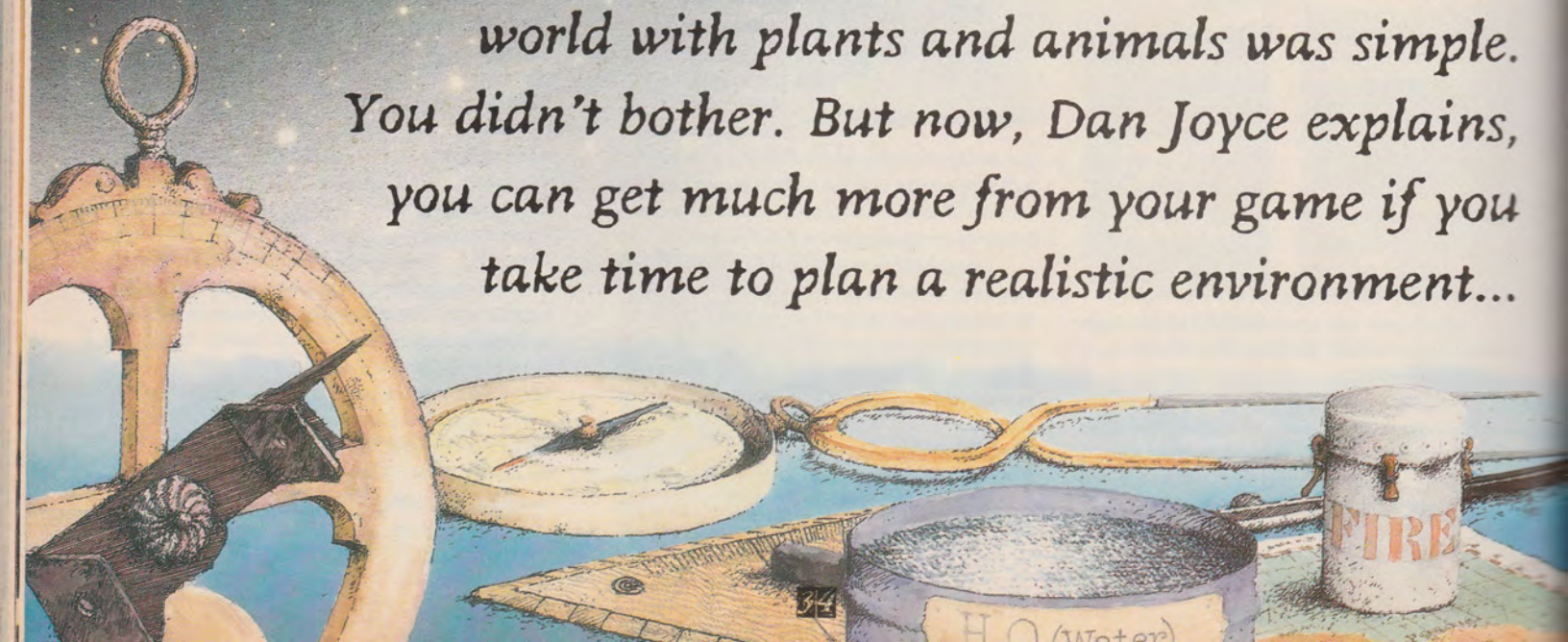
Coverage: all games

Flying in the face of flashiness, *Games Gazette* is a single-handedly-produced, duplicated, genuinely amateur magazine that provides a comprehensive reviews service for gamesplayers, publishers, and distributors. Its coverage is very broad, encompassing roleplaying games, board games, computer games and card games. It has recently celebrated its 15th birthday as a regular bi-monthly publication and over the years has become part of the games establishment throughout the UK. *Games Gazette* is available on subscription from the address below, but it can also be found in several UK game and hobby stores at 95p per copy. The latest issue has a free *Magic: The Gathering* card and also a *Star Trek* CCG card attached.

Available from: Chris Baylis, 67 Mynchens, Lee Chapel North, Basildon, Essex SS15 5EG

Illustration: David Atkinson

Once upon a time, the approach to stocking your world with plants and animals was simple. You didn't bother. But now, Dan Joyce explains, you can get much more from your game if you take time to plan a realistic environment...



World Builder Part 2:

FLORA AND FAUNA

Under the heading 'Dungeon Mastering as a fine art' in the original pale blue *Basic D&D* book, circa 1978, you got the following gem of gameworld advice:

"Before the players can take their bold characters on adventures, the Dungeon Master must sit down, pencil in hand, and map out the dungeons on graph paper... place a few special items, then randomly assign treasure and monsters to the other rooms..."

Okay, hands up – we all did it. It was easy. Goblins here, ochre jelly there, wizard there... all sat around in their own little time loops. Compared to this, creating a whole ecosystem seems a tall order. It isn't.

You can still take fairly arbitrary decisions. But after you've made your decisions, step back and see how what you've got meshes together.

Ecosystems Made Easy

Take a simple food chain (realistically, it ought to be a food web, but this'll do): plant – grazing animal – carnivore.

Into this comes man, who kills off the carnivore because it's dangerous. Result? Overgrazing decimates the plant life. If conditions are right, you get a desert. And the life that's left starts to adapt, and faster than you think. (The real-world case of the Melanic Moth, which changed its lichen-and-stone camouflage to suit inner-city soot-coloured stone, is a real favourite of biology teachers.)

You don't have to work out what a plant in a dry environment would be like, of course, because you can copy real examples. You know it'll be in a form that conserves water, like a cactus, and not like a broad-leafed tree. If there's little food, you'll get little animals, like the desert rat, or at least fewer bigger ones.

The fun comes in putting in an added twist, developing a plant or animal along slightly different lines. You've got an island? How about bats that run along the ground instead of flying? For some ideas, have a look at Dougal Dixon's *The New Dinosaurs: An Alternate Evolution.*

Plants Aren't Wallpaper

People don't get hot on botany, possibly because the timescale of plants is different (slow) and possibly because most of us have a 'known tree list', for example, that runs: oak tree, christmas tree, conker tree, er...

If you apply the laws that govern the physiology of flying creatures to the birdmen from *Flash Gordon*, they'd have to have wings about 50 feet wide and a breastbone that stuck out about six feet in front of the body. David Attenborough pointed this out when he was talking about angels on the telly, so it must be true.

In Part One of the five-part *World Builder* series, Dan explained how to think up a really original concept for your world or universe, with advice from sci-fi writer Brian Aldiss. If you missed it, why not buy a back issue?

So the RPG default landscape tends to be Britain with less rain. This is okay if it's well described – check out Robert Holdstock's *Mythago Wood* for excellent descriptions of primal woodland.

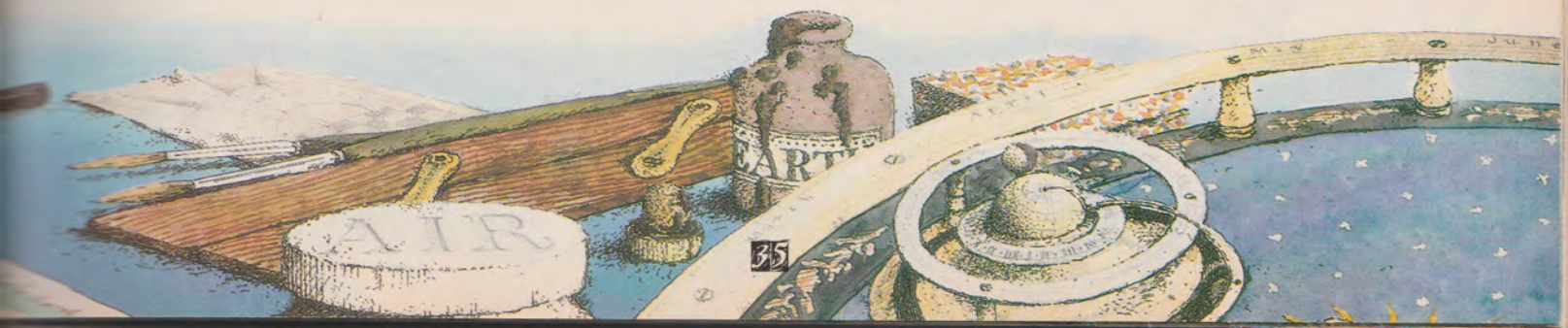
But it's less okay if the plants just sit in the background like floral wallpaper. Make them part of the scene. Make them have impact, because they do.

Imagine a world without, say, grass. The prairies would be, what? Patchy forest? Shrubs? Desert? Potato fields?

Occasionally, plants will even have a starring roll – that of plot device. In David Brinn's *The Uplift War,* there are vines on the planet Garth that distribute essential chemical nutrients around the forest – and they're used to great effect (I'm not saying how) by the heroes. Describing one or two significant plants like this is a lot easier than trying to re-invent botany.

Dangerous plants, and carnivorous plants, tend to get more attention. Sometimes too much; plants don't evolve solely to eat/poison/maim players. (Those on Harry Harrison's Deathworld are an honourable exception, but they've got that way for a reason.) Carnivorous plants, for instance, have evolved to live in acidic, poor soils where supplementing the 'diet' with insects is useful.

The ecology of *D&D*'s green slime, a carnivorous plant that dissolves flesh but can't move – except perhaps to drop on →



Here Be Dragons

"Dragons come in many colors, sizes and shapes. Most are intelligent. Large, old dragons are far too formidable for low level characters to combat, and even young ones are exceedingly dangerous opponents."
Dungeons & Dragons **'blue book' version, Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson, ed. Eric Holmes (TSR Games, published in UK by Games Workshop)**

Dragons have been in roleplaying games from the beginning, but all too often they're the same old beastie. Different colour, different kind of deadly breath, but basically Smaug by any other name. arcane asked two authors who have done their own things with dragons where they got their ideas from, why they went a different route, and whether it is crucial that an author must rationalise his or her own creations...

Anne McCaffrey

"I got the inspiration for dragons from several directions: 1) a charming story in *Fantasy & Science Fiction* about dragonflies; 2) reading the spare fiction of Cecilia Holland's *The Firedrake,* which only gave the reader details that were unusual to a person living in 1065 AD; and 3) the need of folks to have reassurance.

"The short answer is that I needed to develop a new sort of critter to write about and I thought dragons had been badly portrayed in the West... whereas in the Eastern cultures, they are considered good luck and fortunate.

"Pernese dragons are totally different from the usual virgin-eating, village-burning, knight-fighting western dragons of the medieval tales. Mine are friendly, fire-breathing to destroy an aerial menace, telepathic and teleporting, which allows their riders to travel long distances quickly. They are 'Impressed' at Hatching with a human partner, and it is a partnership, for the rider and dragon have a symbionic relationship that lasts until the human dies. It is so strong that the dragon commits suicide if he/she has lost the partner. They cannot survive without him/her.

"But I have NOT anthropomorphized the dragons and do not write from their point of view as if I understand such an alien mind. As far as I'm concerned, an author may do what s/he wishes with her/his own material... up to rationalizing a fictional animal whichever way to tell the story they have in mind."

Terry Pratchett

"As fas as I'm aware, all Anne M's dragons were rationalisations of the traditional dragon. All I did was create 'real' dragons (little unstable things that can't fly very well) and my variation of the 'classic' dragon which is so clearly unsuited to our physics that it requires magic in order to continue to exist.

"I think an author can do what they damn well like with a fictional animal – rationalise it, accept it, explain it, whatever. The important thing is that the story has to work."

"'I always wanted to see dragons, ever since I was a little lad. Dragons flying around in the sky, breathing flames...'

'They just used to crawl around in swamps and stuff, and all they breathed was stink,' said Hrun, lying down in the bunk. 'They weren't very big either. They used to collect firewood.'"
The Colour of Magic **(Corgi)**

"The largest carnivorous plants are in the genus *Nepenthes* – large vines up to tens of metres long. This genus also catches some of the largest prey, including creatures as large as frogs. The most complex and fast trap belongs to the underwater plants in the genus *Utricularia,* which suck prey into bladders in times as short as one 30th of a second.'
– *The Carnivorous Plant FAQ* at http://astro.as.arizona.edu/~barry/cps/faq/faq.html

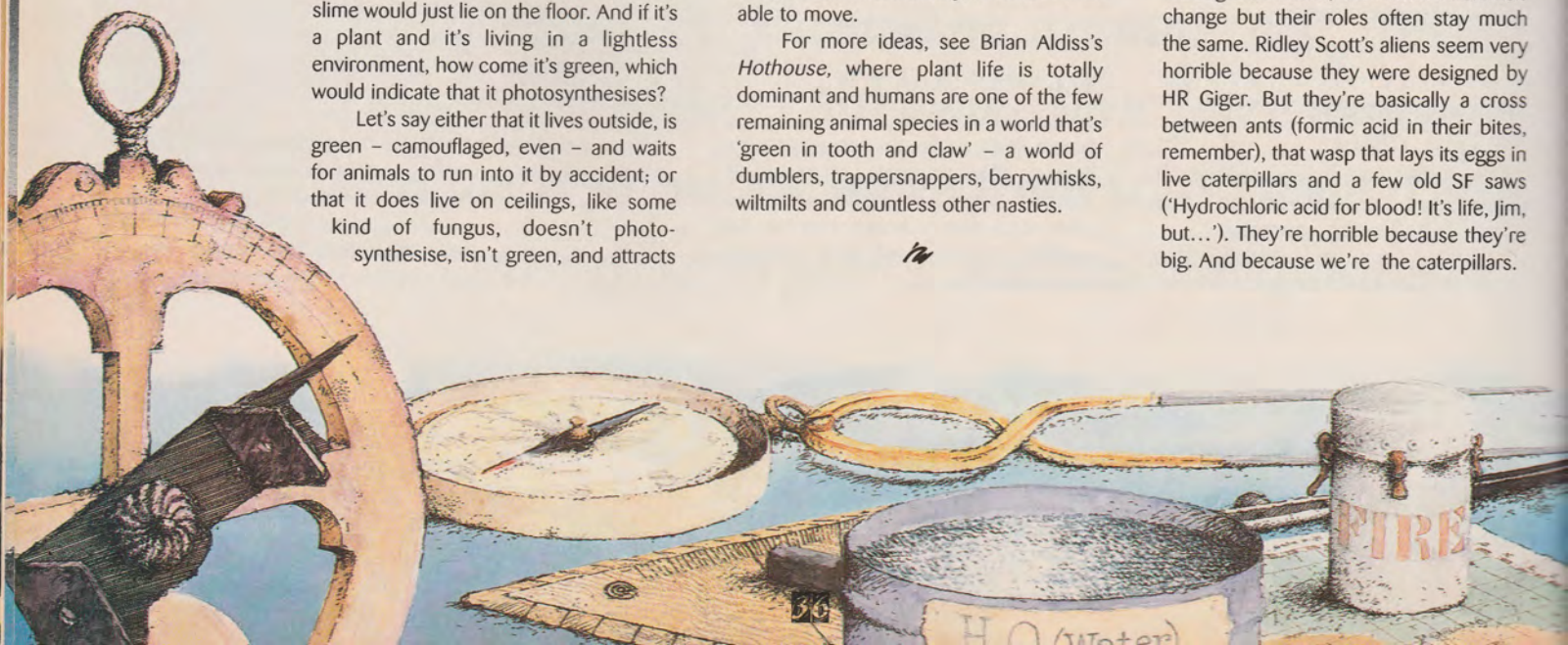
← things – doesn't add up. Traditionally, it lives on cave roofs or ceilings. How? After dropping on the first victim, every green slime would just lie on the floor. And if it's a plant and it's living in a lightless environment, how come it's green, which would indicate that it photosynthesises?

Let's say either that it lives outside, is green – camouflaged, even – and waits for animals to run into it by accident; or that it does live on ceilings, like some kind of fungus, doesn't photosynthesise, isn't green, and attracts flying or crawling things to it – by smell, perhaps – and it doesn't actually fall on things at all. Alternatively, it needs to be able to move.

For more ideas, see Brian Aldiss's *Hothouse,* where plant life is totally dominant and humans are one of the few remaining animal species in a world that's 'green in tooth and claw' – a world of dumblers, trappersnappers, berrywhisks, wiltmilts and countless other nasties.

Animals — the infinite variety

Throughout fiction, the forms of animals change but their roles often stay much the same. Ridley Scott's aliens seem very horrible because they were designed by HR Giger. But they're basically a cross between ants (formic acid in their bites, remember), that wasp that lays its eggs in live caterpillars and a few old SF saws ('Hydrochloric acid for blood! It's life, Jim, but...'). They're horrible because they're big. And because we're the caterpillars.



Blowing things up large is an old B-movie trick. You only realise how ugly insects (and arachnids) are when you look at them through a magnifying glass. So we get endless variations on *The Giant Spiders that Ate New York*, or whatever.

Technically, it's not possible anyway, since a chitin exoskeleton puts a limit on the size of an animal. But it palls a bit anyway. Giant spiders are boring. After Shelob and the spider in *The Incredible Shrinking Man*, they need a new spin.

Take a look at John Wyndham's *Web* to see how interesting, and dangerous, spiders become if, instead of making them big, you make them communal.

Or give the giant insects another role other than 'run out and bite x'. The domesticated troll insects in Chaosium's *Trollpack* (now *Troll Land*) are great.

Dinosaurs are a good example of how roles can easily be transposed. A prehistoric bird you can ride is effectively a horse. A triceratops is basically a cow; a velociraptor could theoretically be a hunting dog. Harry Harrison's *West of Eden* has plenty of ideas on these lines, though they're mostly based around deliberate genetic manipulation.

For creating other animals, base them on what's already out there. This doesn't mean following the Greek monster method – legs of lion, head of goat, wings of bat and so on. Look instead at familiar, or even unfamiliar, animals and pick out particular characteristics: the metamorphosis process of tadpoles, the camouflage of chameleons, the sonar used by bats, the water-squirting of the archerfish... Most of it's not just stranger than you imagine, as the saying goes, but stranger than you *can* imagine.

Traveller offers a simple framework for animal creation. Animals are classed as 'horned herbivore', 'clawed chaser' and so on. This is handy because it forces you to think about what the animal does before you consider what it looks like.

Animal behaviour is most simply and most effectively handled if you just copy real-world behaviour patterns. If you know an animal behaves like, say, a wolf, you can ensure that it isn't as stupid and destructive as something from *Doom*.

A word on agression: in the real world, dangerous animals don't attack people that often. And when they do, they're usually saying 'Bugger off! I live here' or 'Get away from my kids' rather than 'I'm a barking mad man-eater and I'm hungry!' Lions generally run away from people, for instance. In fact, herbivores are generally more dangerous than carnivores, even though they might only trample you by accident.

There are exceptions. Crocodiles treat humans as prey, and the less sensate animals like scorpions ('Back off, whatever you are') and sharks ('Oh, look, seal') may not need much provocation.

"It seems significant to me that the majority of the writers who have closely followed Tolkien have not produced much in the way of original landscape. Deserts and mountains are vast, and forests are dense. In the work of people like Stephen Donaldson they are rarely more than Hollywood movie scenery.'
– Michael Moorcock, *Wizardry and Wild Romance* (Gollancz)

Monsters — No Such Thing As

Well, they're animals aren't they? All the rules for animals hold here too, except 'monsters' – by definition – are more vicious. If you're running a fantasy campaign, they may be magical or 'unnatural'. In fact many monsters were essentially metaphors, and as such don't have much of an ecology worked out. Whereas all animals are born, eat, shag, and die, metaphorical monsters just die – usually on the end of a sword.

But if you're going to use them as real creatures, you'll have to come up with something. If a cockatrice turns victims to stone (as opposed to the classical version, which just killed at a glance), what the hell does it eat? Wherever it lives, there is going to be a lot of stonework around.

The other thing to bear in mind about monsters is that many were one of a kind. The Minotaur, the Hydra, the Brollachan. You didn't bump into them everywhere, and you didn't meet lots of different monsters (certainly not from different mythologies) one after the other.

Less is more with monsters. If they're around every corner, we're back in the zoo again.

"Natural selection won't matter soon, not anywhere near as much as conscious selection."
– Greg Bear, quoted in David Brinn's *The Uplift War* (Bantam)

And Next Month

We'll cover intelligent animals – including man – in the next instalment, when we look at societies.

Rationalising Grendel

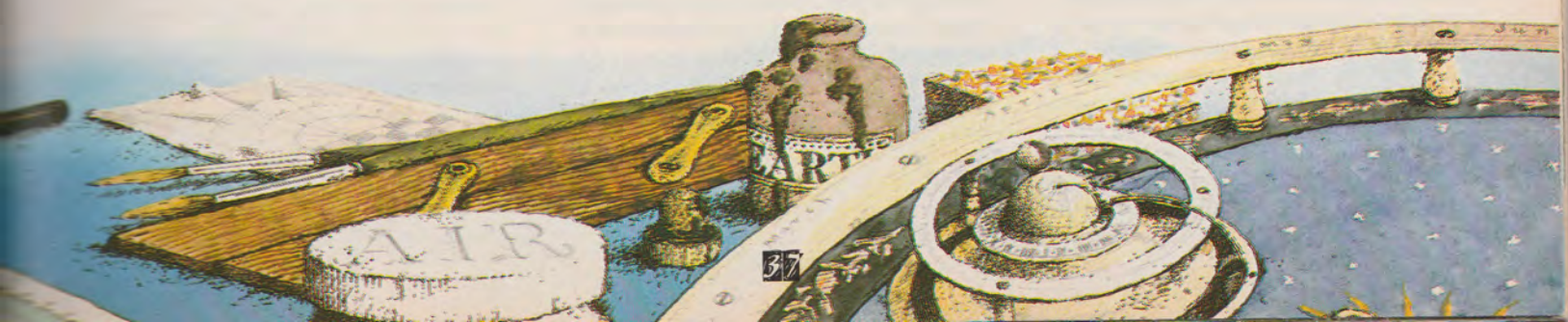
Walking through the shadows came... what? A troll, we're told by the *Beowulf* poet. But you never really know what Grendel looks like. So let's take him out of the story and into the daylight (or rather, the night). And, purists, this is just an interpretation, okay?

Here's what we know about Grendel: carnivore, attacks people, biped, lives in air-filled cave beneath a mere; very strong, tough skin; doesn't use weapons; can't speak. The water business suggests he's an amphibian, holds his breath like a mammal or has above-water nostrils like a crocodile.

'Crocodile' sounds good, and if we take that analogy further it gives us some of his other characteristics, ie vicious carnivore, fairly tough skin. Since he can't just survive by eating people, it even gives a method of attack other animals; he could lurk in pools and launch out of them, grabbing animals that come down to drink.

Some other things we know about Grendel's kin is that they collect shiny objects (swords, treasure, but plenty of tat as well, presumably) and they live in small family groups. They don't tend to use weapons – no opposable thumb, perhaps.

So, he's a lizardman, basically. More primitive than your typical RPG version, but the image fits okay. It's a start.



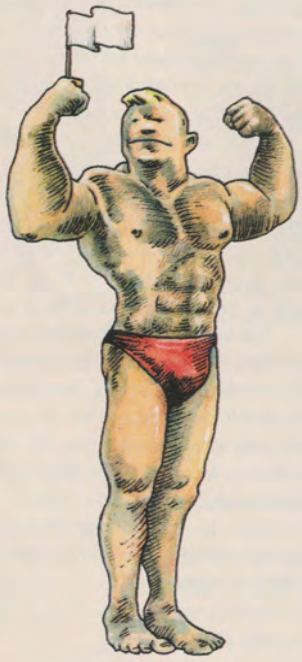
arcane's 10 most bizarre skills EVER

They can't seem to resist being silly, these game designers...

Loose eyes

'Plüsch, Power und Plunder'
Phase Publishing 1995

This comes from the roleplaying game where you play a cuddly toy. Who says Germans have no sense of humour? Certainly not **arcane**. Anyway, the skill itself: being a cuddly toy, you'll be having trouble with those eyes. Falling out and stuff. Never mind! Think of the advantages... now you can hold one in your hand and look around corners. Spitze!



Surrender and still look like a man

'Hole' Dirt Merchant Games 1994

The game of space comedy (now available through White Wolf) gives us this fantastically useful skill: "So you lost the battle. At least go home with your nuts intact. Don't let the enemy hand them to you in a sandwich baggie. Quit while you're ahead – keep dignity alive." This commendable game for the enthusiastic hunter of cheesy skills also features the 'Withstand bagpipes' skill, as well as 'Run with scissors', and the majestic 'Operate starship and chew gum at the same time'. Marvellous.

Blather

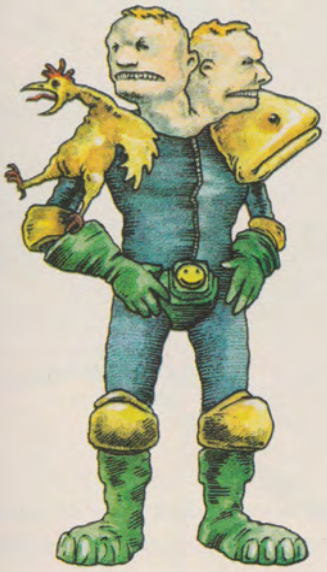
'Warhammer Fantasy Role Play'
Hogshead Publishing 1995

The ever-popular *Warhammer Fantasy Role Play* does us proud yet again by hiding this cracking little skill within its depths. Being able to blather means you can talk garbage for tactical advantage. As the manual puts it: "Blatherers simply invent a complete string of nonsense, ranting on and on while their victims stand dumbfounded, wondering whether they're insane, intoxicated or possibly dangerous." We're speechless.

Run in high heels

'Macho Women with Guns'
Blacksburg Tactical Research Center 1994

The world has changed. Women have taken over. Somebody with a horribly sexist sense of humour has written a game about it. We *had* to quote this: "Wearing high heels is an automatic +2 to Looks, but any attempt to move more than 2 hexes per turn requires a roll on this skill. If you fail the roll, you fall down and are so embarrassed that you lose your turn. Really bad rolls mean you break a heel and must remove the high heels until you reach a shoe store." Quite extraordinary.



Two heads

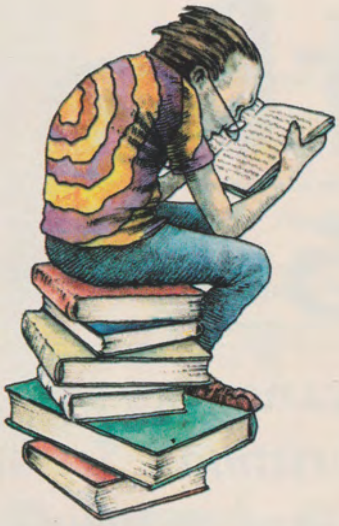
'Judge Dredd Companion' Games Workshop 1987

From the *Judge Dredd* roleplaying game – whatever happened to it? Any Judge who chooses this as a skill has two heads and is therefore decreed a mutant and turfed out into the Cursed Earth. Hmm... very useful.

Arcane Mutterings

'Earthdawn' FASA 1992

FASA's extraordinary fantasy game gives us this extraordinarily fantastic skill. Arcane mutterings is the skill of walking about with your head down, muttering such potent-sounding fragments of litany and incantation under your breath that people believe you're a hugely powerful wizard. Whether you are or not. Superb.



Homework

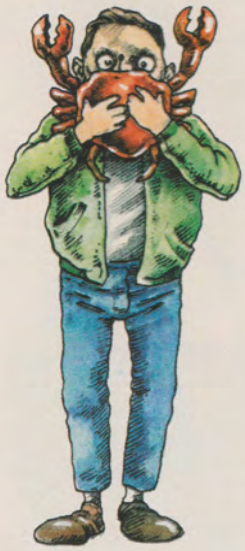
'Alma Mater' Oracle Games Ltd 1982

From the game of, er, being at high school, this skill represents the character's ability to do homework, assignments and term papers. Apparently, it will increase the grade by 5 points per level. Why has no-one else thought of that?

Blubber

'Underground' Mayfair Games 1993

One of the strange characteristics of genetically engineered veterans in the 2020s is this fabulous enhancement – fat that acts as armour. Not strictly a skill, perhaps, but surely one of the most impressive character traits seen in any game.



Mollusk Control

'GURPS' Steve Jackson Games 1986

The *Generic Universal Role Playing System* enables you to recreate any genre you like. There is a magic spell (all right, it's not really a skill, but we liked it too much to miss it out) called Mollusk control. Useful if you have to deal with an octopus or giant squid, which fortunately doesn't happen every day. Pretty useless, however, if you haven't got a degree in zoology.

Spurious Logic

'Paranoia' West End Games 1984 (appropriately enough)

This darkly humorous game of the near future, where the computer is boss and people are expendable, features this skill to help out the poor, beleaguered humans. You simply use spurious logic to convince the computers and robots to do something that would ordinarily go against their better judgement. Present a convincing enough argument, and they'll do anything. Imagine how useful that could be in real life...

Illustration by Andrew Dixon

the source

arcane *goes shopping for Christmas. See our bulging bags opened on your kitchen table...*

Rigid card sleeves

Don't want to get that extra-special card bent? These may be expensive but they're hard as well...

Supplied by Hobbygames, available from all good gaming stores.

5 PVC top loader pockets 99p

Hex Pads

More useful than you can imagine. As an aid to mapping or planning these little fellas are indispensable.

Supplied by Hobbygames, available from all good gaming stores.

Pads £2.49

Dice, dice and even more dice

More dice than you can shake a snake at and available in all sorts of finishes from 'Glitter' to (oh, dear) 'Elemental'.

Supplied by Hobbygames, available from all good gaming stores.

7 dice per tube £1.99–£2.99

Doctor Who Postcards

A splendid collection of the good Doctor and various monsters and assistants. Impress your friends...

Supplied by Boxtree, available from good bookstores.

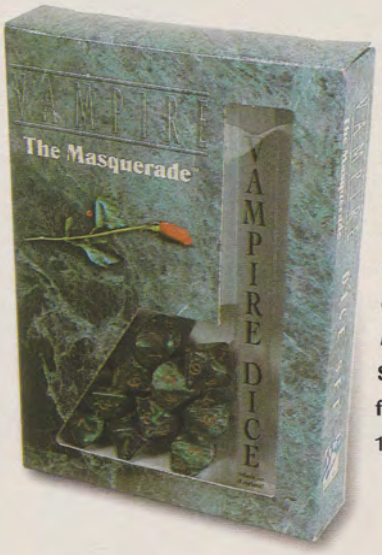
Postcards (for 20) £4.99

Battery-Powered Card Shuffler

When we saw this in the 'Innovations' catalogue, we couldn't help ourselves. We rang them up straight away and got one for ourselves. It sure saves time at CCG tournaments (and scares your opponent to death).

From **Innovations** 01793 433500

Card Shuffler £12.95



Vampire Dice

Well, we gave them a chance, but they didn't attempt to suck our blood or anything. These tastefully-finished green and red dice are official for *Vampire: The Masquerade* though.

Supplied by Hobbygames, available from all good gaming stores.

10-sided dice (for 10) £3.99

Miniatures Carry Case

These things are so good that we use them ourselves. Hassle-free miniatures transportation is A Good Thing.

Supplied by Hobbygames, available from all good gaming stores.

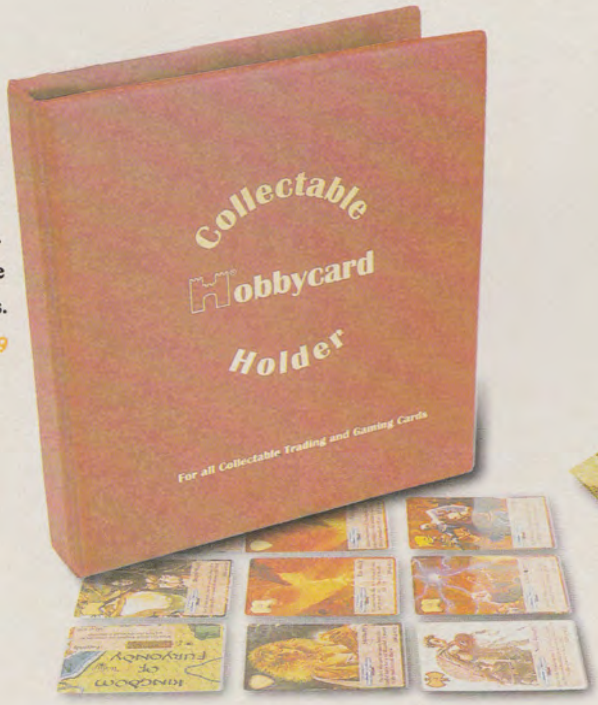
Ultimate Carrying Case £6.99

Hobbycard holder

A reasonably priced and fairly solid holder for keeping all your important cards in. How useful, and at the same time, how stylish.

Supplied by **Hobbygames, available from all good gaming stores.**

Hobbycard holder £5.99



Lottery Dice

If it wasn't true, we wouldn't believe it. The red dice is numbered from 0-4 and is for the tens... Caramba!

Supplied by Hobbygames, available from all good gaming stores.

Lottery dice 99p

Floorplans

Just cut them out and stick them together in different formations to create endless adventures. Blimey.

Supplied by Hobbygames, available from all good gaming stores.

Exterior Floorplans (for 12) £2.49 Mixed Floorplans (for 12) £1.99

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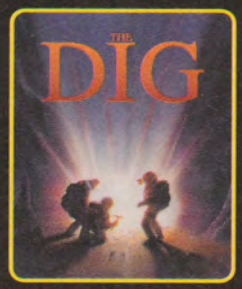


PULL OUT & KEEP
ENCOUNTERS

#2

The second in a series of collectable encounters presented in

arcane

The Golden Dragon Inn

by Ken & Jo Walton

Weary and seeking shelter for the night and food, perhaps even a hard-earned drink or two, you find yourself outside the door of The Golden Dragon – as welcoming a place as you could wish for. Or so it seems. But when you go inside, you may find it has a few secrets and a few surprises in store...

A superb 16-page scenario suitable for any setting, ancient or modern...

The Golden Dragon Inn

"Thank you for buying me a pint, young adventurer. Ah, that's a good brew – haven't tasted better since I was in the old Golden Dragon Inn when I was a young lad. That was a long time ago, but I still remember it well...

"The seats made out of old barrels sawn in half, the floor covered in sawdust, half a pig roasting over the fireplace, the dogs fighting under the table and the sweet taste of the ale. And the people, of course – the people go without saying.

"Young Molly the barmaid, and Tess the landlady with arms as broad around as my legs – she wouldn't let any trouble get started. If Tess said she was throwing someone out, she'd pick them up one-handed – one in each hand – and you'd see them bounce on their heads in the cobbled yard and be lucky to wake up before morning.

"Then there were the singers – three of them, taking turns, always someone tuning up a harp and giving a song. And the customers – making deals quietly at the tables or shouting out demands to all comers.

"Why, kingdoms have risen and fallen over decisions made at The Golden Dragon – I could tell you a tale or two of adventurers like yourself who've found their fortunes there. Why, thank you kindly, my dear; I would be glad to have another drink with you..."

Illustrations ©Simon Carr & arcane

The party might come to the inn because they want somewhere to eat, drink or sleep. Alternatively, they could come there looking for work, or contacts; or someone might arrange to meet them there. They may be drawn there investigating smuggling, or looking for passage to somewhere else. Once they have visited, they may want to go back every time they are in town.

The Golden Dragon can be located anywhere that's big enough to have a dock quarter. It may be located in any world, and at any point in time. All you have to do is alter it appropriately, perhaps in just small ways.

In a fantasy setting, the chandelier works by magic and there may be a young golden dragon kept for lighting the fire; or just the ring in the wall where a young golden dragon used to be tethered, before that awful, long-remembered night when it got loose and escaped...

The System

You're a smart person, right? We don't need to patronise you with detailed rules on how to translate these people and events into your own system, do we? But just in case you're uncertain, here's a couple of tips. Whenever we do a character description (you'll find them all at the end), we'll say something like 'Doctor Bloggs has a fine, incisive mind and this is complemented by a strong, athletic body. As a child, however, he suffered from a rare lung disorder that means he has difficulty in sustaining effort. He is also prone to making rather impulsive decisions.' In game terms this would mean that Doctor Bloggs has above-average strength, intelligence and dexterity and below-average constitution and wisdom. Exactly how much above and below average is up to you and the strength of your party of adventurers. This is also the case in systems that use levels. Give the encounter's characters the sort of levels that will make them a challenge for your players. You'll find similar descriptions of all important physical objects, such as 'the door is paper-thin' or 'this glass is bullet-proof'. Now stop reading this wibble and get stuck in.

In a historical setting, the inn is just as it appears here.

In the present day or near future, it is as it appears here but is considered to be "quaint" and "traditional".

In a cyberpunk or dark-future setting, the lights are dimmer, the waitresses are replaced by electronic table order displays, the chandelier is a mirrored ball and people are more suspicious of each other (and of newcomers).

In a space-opera setting it is part of a space-station dock, and although the floor plan is different the atmosphere is much the same...

First impressions...

The Golden Dragon is a friendly place, where people of all sorts can mingle without trouble. It is located in the dock quarter, and is known for being a place where you can bump into people from far away. It's a good place for finding passage on a ship bound for distant places – or for arranging for a little contraband.

Tess, the landlady, discourages brawling and fights on the premises – and, since she is very tough and will be backed up by all her regulars, the Dragon is generally peaceful. It is rarely quiet, though.

There is always a loud buzz of conversation, and often music from one of the regular musicians. Sometimes there is a rowdy sing-song, with customers joining in and banging their tankards on the tables.

The bar is open all the time, regardless of legality. It serves drinks, food and rooms for sleeping, or whatever you want. It has been on the same spot from time immemorial.

Locations

The Bar

This is the main room and also the main entrance to The Golden Dragon. The room takes up the full height of two floors, and there are stairs up to the balcony in the corners.

The bar faces you as you go in. There are tables dotted around the room. The bar stools are made of half-barrels, but the other tables have benches. On the east wall is a huge fireplace, which is occasionally used for cooking if the kitchen fireplace is full.

The room will never be less than half-full – the busiest times are evenings, and the quietest times are late afternoons and very early mornings – 3am-6am and 3pm-6pm.

Looking around the room you see an assortment of customers, and they see you. There are waitresses moving through the crowds with drinks and trays of food – sooner or later one will spot you and make sure you have what you need.

The Dining Room

Sometimes used as a private room, but usually it is where meals are served. It has one huge table running the length of the room, with benches along the sides.

Breakfast is served to guests in the dining room, and meals are served in there at other times if the bar is especially full, or by request. When you order food you are asked where you want to eat. There is no privacy in the Dining Room. Typically you are seated wherever there is space. This can be a good way to make friends – or enemies.

The Private Rooms

These rooms have chairs and tables for eating, and also sofas and comfortable but threadbare chairs for relaxing in. They are ideal for private dining, or for private meetings. The furniture can be moved and arranged as desired – for a small extra consideration Tess will gladly arrange for people to help you move it about.

Room 1 also has a screen, usually arranged against the wall but which can be pulled out to screen off a corner, or conceal a watcher. Rooms 2 & 3 can be hired together or separately. There are possibilities for overhearing what is said between these two rooms if the door is not tightly closed. Private meetings in Room 2 may be interrupted by people passing to or from Room 3. The table in the corner of room 3 conceals a trapdoor to the beer cellar.

Kitchens

The domain of Matt, the cook, and his scurrying assistants, is full of cooking utensils and food. It always looks chaotic in here, with piles of dirty dishes and everyone moving at top speed. The place is reasonably clean, however. Matt will not take kindly to anyone entering the kitchens without permission.

The far corner of the kitchens is the larder, used for storage of food which does not need the cold of the cellar – huge sacks of flour, sugar, dried fruit, etc.

There are entrances to the cellar from the kitchen for getting supplies, and from the larder to the contraband cellar. This trapdoor is opened by a lever which must be pressed forward and then back – if it is just pressed forward, the trap in the cellar will open too, dropping anyone into the water.

Beer Cellar

This is the only legitimate cellar. There are three main entrances, and a concealed entrance, plus a ramp for delivery of barrels from the stableyard. There is a trapdoor from the kitchen, for collection of chilled supplies, and there is a trapdoor from the bar, for arranging supplies of beer and wine.

The concealed entrance is in the corner private room, beneath a table. Anyone going down this trapdoor will find themselves in a legit pub cellar, full of barrels of beer, kegs of wine and kitchen supplies – and, in the far corner, a collection of musical instruments of all descriptions, belonging to Melinda. Hidden behind the beer barrels is a door to the Empty Cellar.

Empty Cellar

This is just as full of barrels as the Beer Cellar, but these barrels are empty and dusty. This room is rarely used, and is just a decoy. If queried, Tess will say she keeps the barrels in case more seats are needed in the bar. The dust is very thick here, and will show clear marks if it is disturbed. There is a very well-hidden door into the Contraband Cellar.

Contraband Cellar

This cellar is entered from a trapdoor in the larder or a concealed door from the Empty Cellar. It is full of smuggled contraband, which will vary according to local laws (see Smuggling). In the corner, below the trapdoor from the larder, there is a very large wooden trapdoor, which reveals an underground canal spur – the way the contraband arrives. It is a difficult struggle to open the trapdoor from down here, as it is intended to be opened by way of the lever above.

The Balcony

Two flights of stairs lead up from the bar to the balcony, which runs all round the top floor. It is wooden, with a waist-high wooden rail all around.

When the Dragon is crowded and a lot of people stand and sit on the balcony, it sometimes groans alarmingly, but it is structurally very safe. It is possible, but risky, to leap down from the balcony – using the chandelier will give extra swing and impetus to the leap. Many rooms lead off the balcony: a bathroom, Tess's quarters in the corner, and bedrooms.

The Bedrooms

These are comfortable, but not luxurious. Each room contains two beds, two chairs, a chamberpot, a ewer and a basin. The bedding is clean. There is a different picture on the wall of each room in a very unusual style. The pictures were painted by an indigenous artist guest who could not pay his bill.

Tess's Quarters

This space consists of a sitting room and connected bedroom. From time to time, Tess may hold especially private meetings upstairs in these rooms, or hide people in her bedroom.

When the door to her bedroom is shut, it is concealed by shelving which slides across, making the bedroom a good hiding place. This cannot be used without Tess's consent. There is an extra bed in the sitting room. Any secrets hidden in Tess's Quarters are at the GM's discretion.

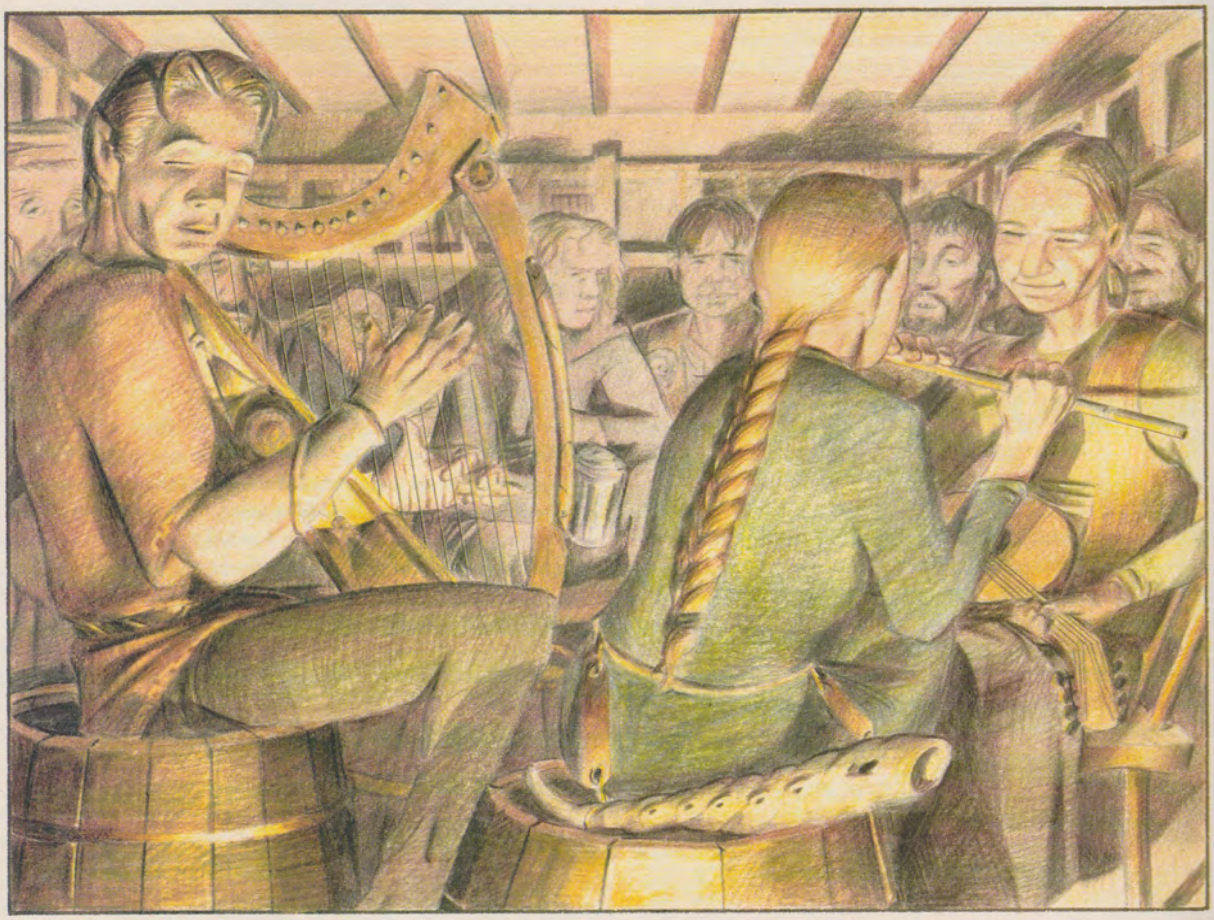
The Stables

Horses can be stabled at the Dragon, and will be well cared for. There are individual stalls, a good supply of hay and vigilant stable staff.

In a modern setting, the stables will be garages for guests, and the stable yard a car-park.

The Stableyard

Because fighting is frowned upon inside, the stableyard has been the site of many brawls and duels. It is walled, which gives it the advantages of privacy and a clear boundary to fights. The ground is cobbled, and many people have found their foot slipping under them at a crucial moment.



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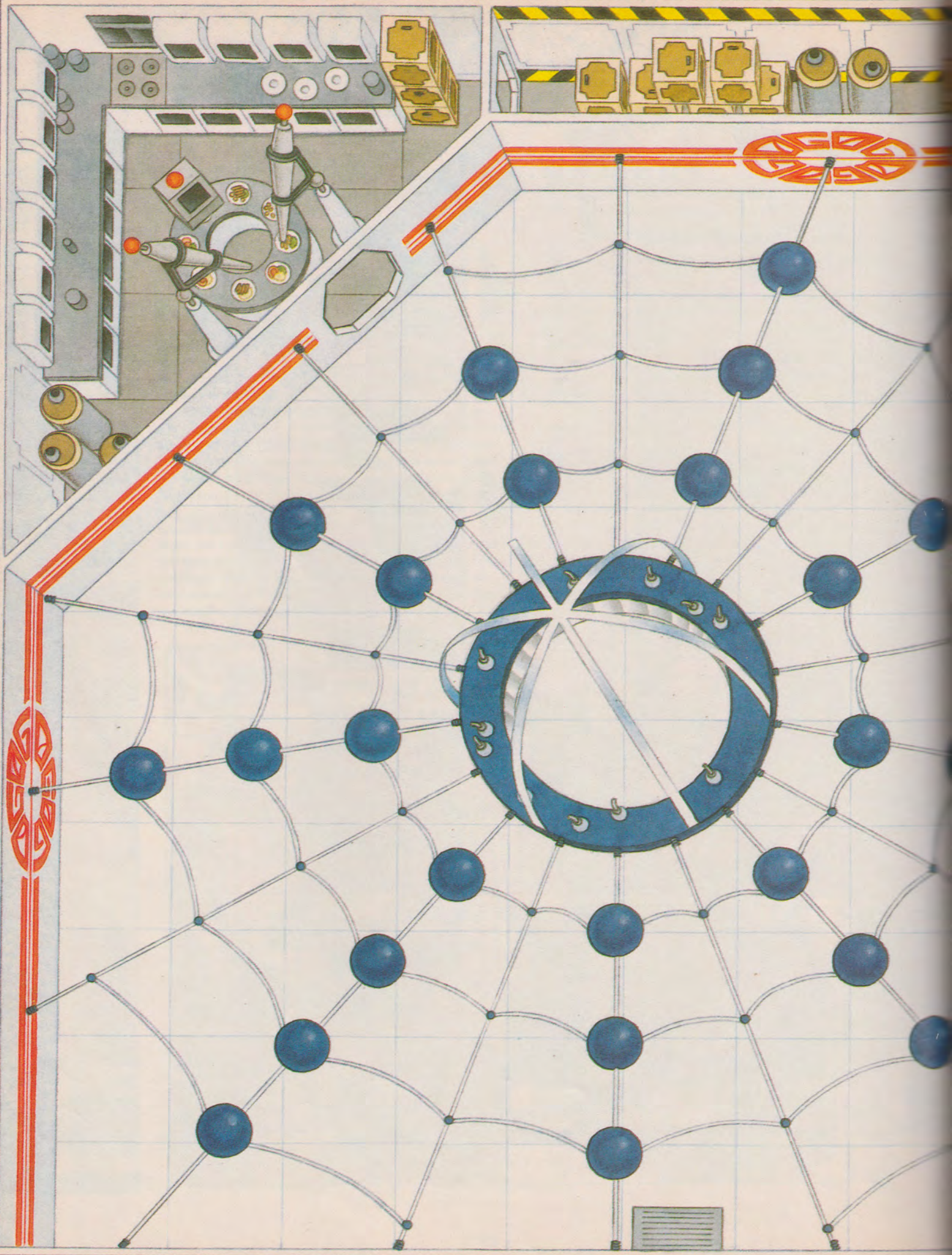

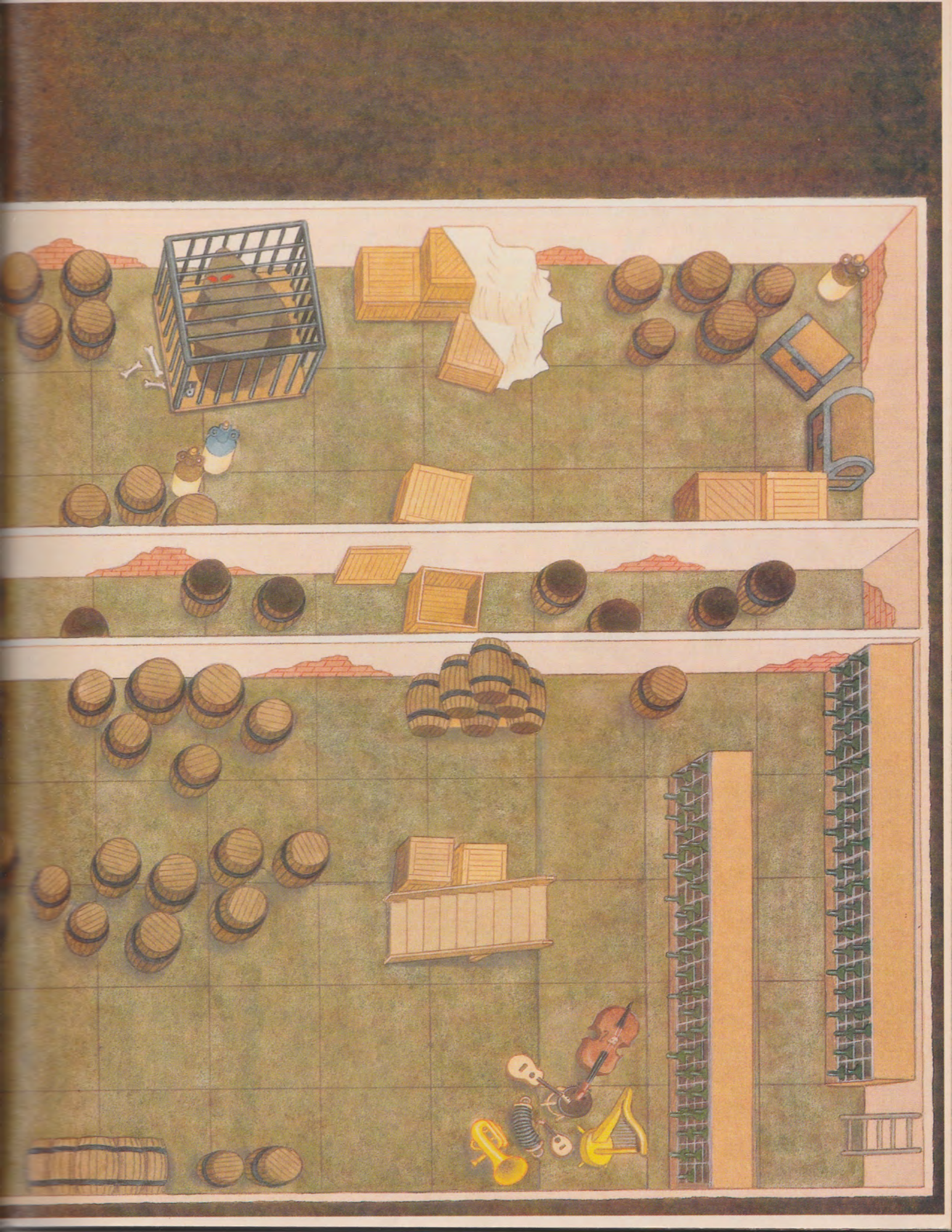

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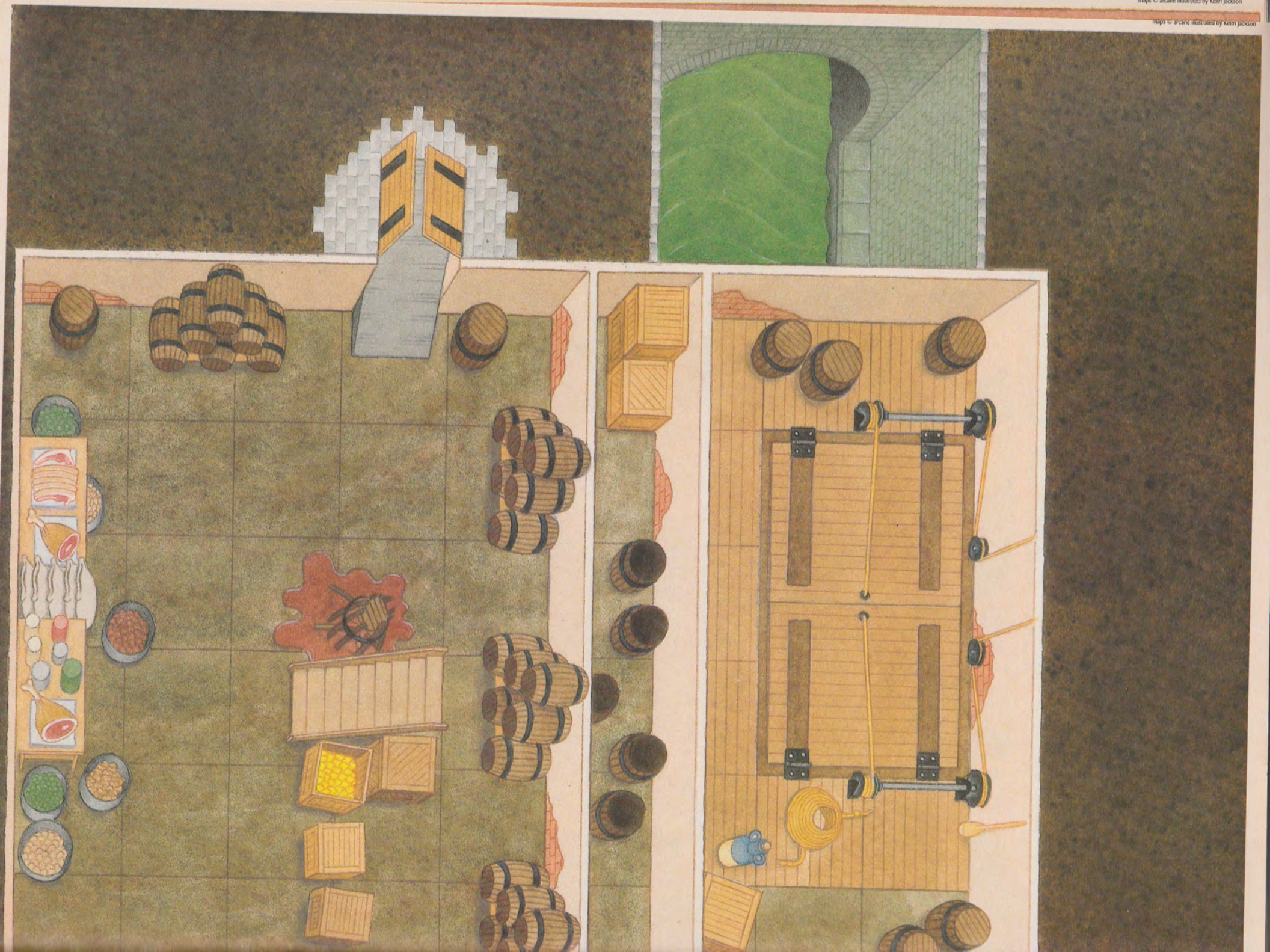

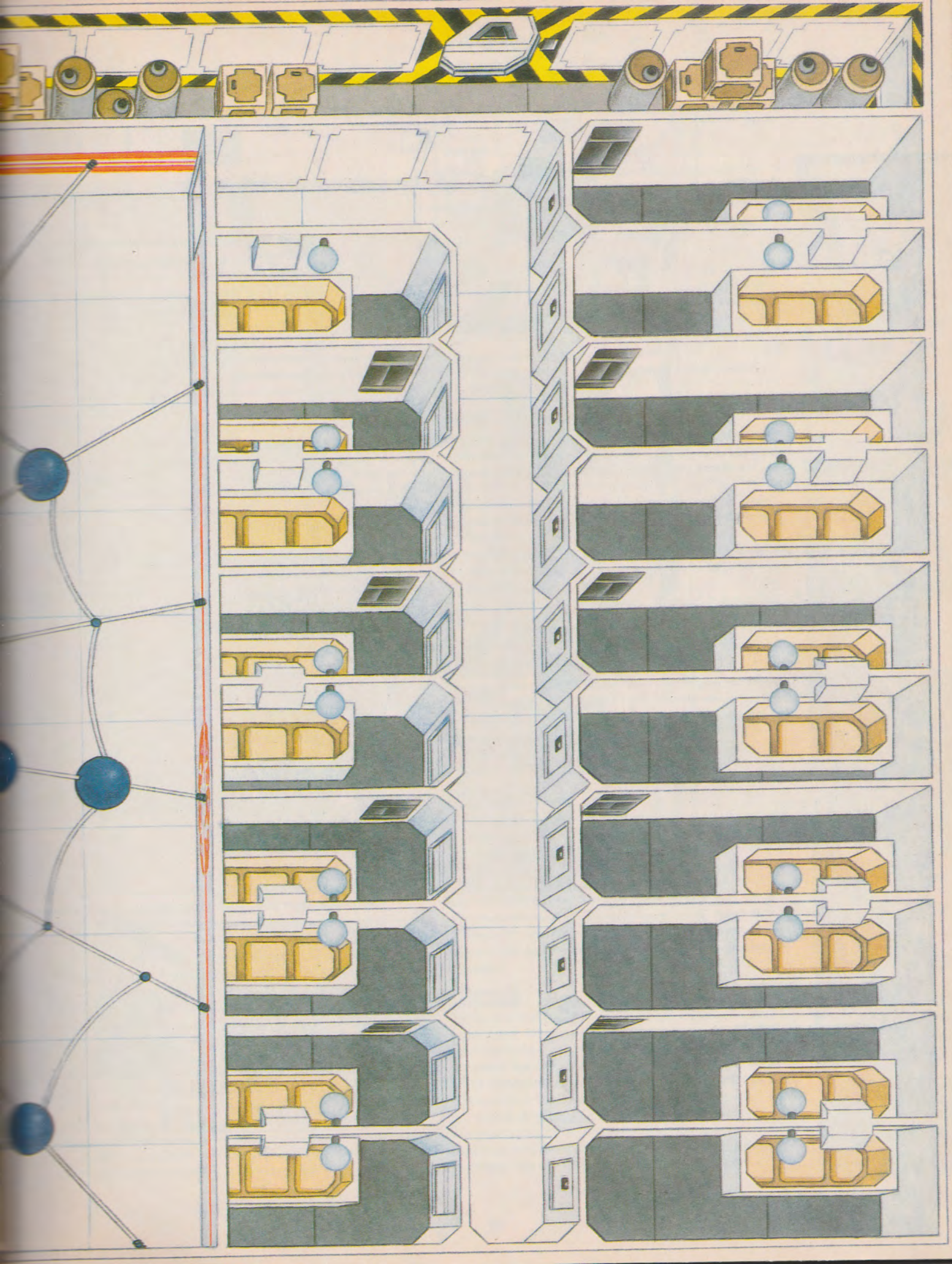

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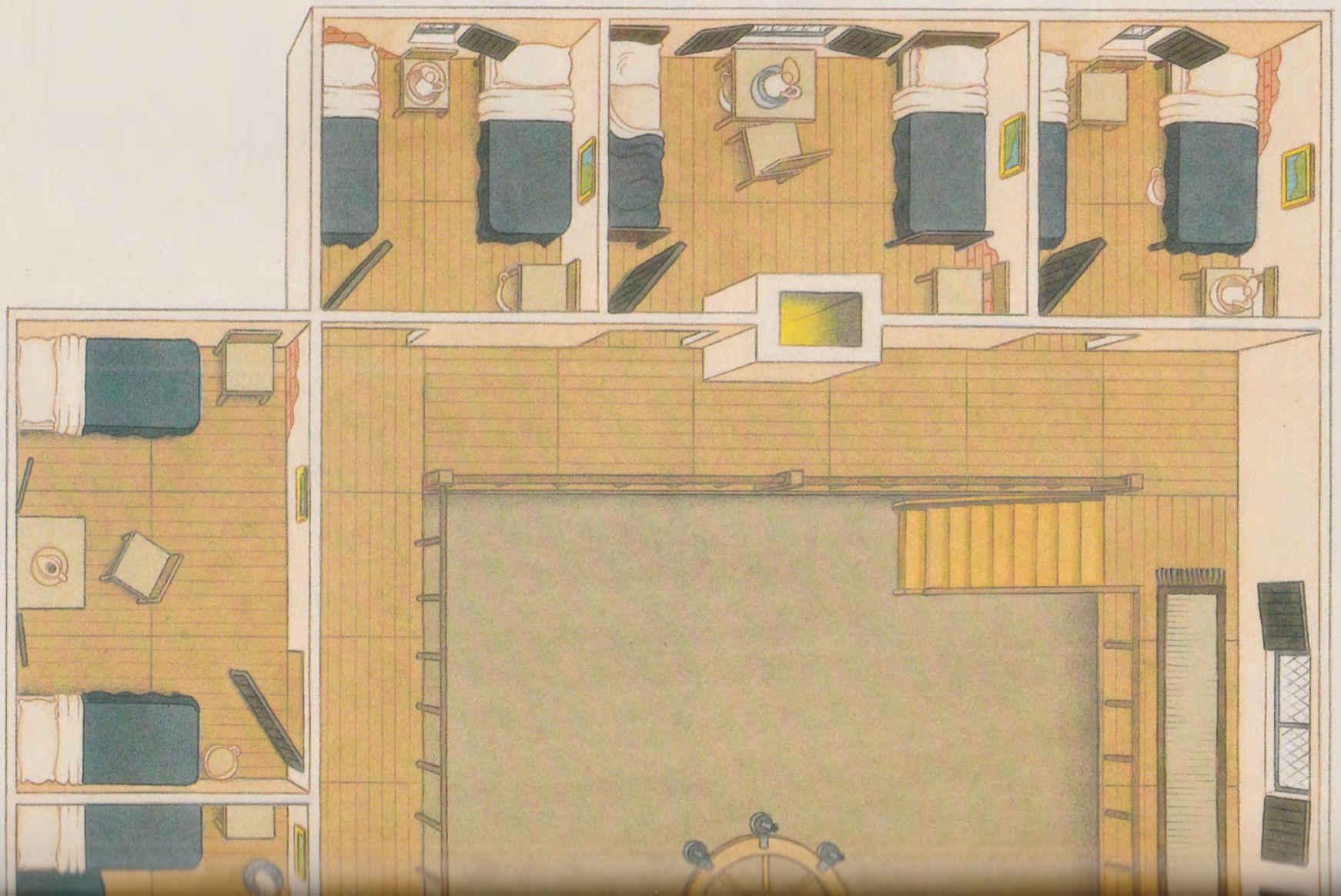


People

Tess

The landlady and owner of The Golden Dragon, she regards the inn and everything that goes on in it as her personal business. She is not much interested in the rest of the world, and she seldom leaves the pub. She is very plain-looking, and her age appears to be late forties.

She is a huge woman, extremely strong. Some people say that she was a wrestler in her youth, others say a pirate. She refuses to confirm any such guesses, only throwing back her head and laughing.

She rules the inn with an iron hand. She is friendly but cautious. She does not really trust anyone except her regulars. She is no genius, but she is not easily fooled.

In a space setting she has no legs but manoeuvres well in the Og of the bar. In a cyber setting she has one glowing red eye and her iron hand is literal!

Molly

One of the waitresses, and the most typical waitress type, Molly is in her early twenties, attractive, with a good figure and a friendly smile. She can move fast if necessary and keeps a throwing knife in her garter. She endears herself to everyone in the hope of getting a good tip. She accepts presents and money from anyone.

Although she acts provocatively and exposes a low cleavage, she is not a prostitute and is horrified to be treated like one. She will occasionally spend the night with guests who take her fancy, but she considers it her right to say yes or no, and will not accept money directly for her affections.

She is very loyal and grateful to Tess and while she can be bribed to let customers overhear other customers, she will in no circumstances betray Tess or the Dragon.

The other waitresses are much the same, although their morals may not be as upright, and they may steal from customers.

Matt

Matt is the cook. He is in his late thirties, a powerfully built man with dark hair and flashing eyes. He is a very good cook, and prepares excellent meals. He regards the kitchen as his domain and has been known to chase inquisitive guests out with his cleaver.

He cooks at a frenetic pace, and sends all his assistants running. They must endure curses and blows, because Matt expects everything to be done perfectly the first time. Kitchen assistants do not necessarily last long at the Dragon, and Matt can often be persuaded that he needs another one.

Cap'n Seamus

Apparently a retired pirate, with all the trimmings: hook, wooden leg and a parrot on his shoulder. He is always by the bar, downing pints and telling stories about how he lost his leg in a battle and how he lost his hand in an explosion. People who listen carefully will notice inconsistencies.

In fact, he was born with one hand and one leg and has never left the town in his life – the parrot was a gift from a real pirate, whose stories he has been telling ever since. The parrot's squawks of "Liar" are outnumbered by the times it says "Pieces of Eight!" and "Splice the Mainbrace" because Cap'n Seamus rewards it with beer for its genuine-sounding remarks. The parrot is often drunk.

Bruno

Bruno is a foreigner, a sailor from a ship. He always stays at the Dragon while in port. He is large, loyal to Tess, none too bright, and has often drunk more beer than is good for him. He can use a knife and whatever other weapons are appropriate for the genre and stands for no nonsense.

There are always a number of sailors like Bruno within Tess's easy call.

Captain Eyes

Eyes is master of her own ship. Nobody knows her real name or her home port, or how she came to be a captain. She is involved in smuggling, and will accept commissions to take people and things around.

She sometimes hires crew in the Dragon, and often knows of foreign ports where people are looking for adventurers of particular sorts, and can sell rides in that direction.

In a cyberpunk or space setting she got her name from her green multi-faceted cyber-eyes that can see in the infra-red and ultraviolet.

She is excellent with all weapons. She is not trustworthy, but it is very hard to read her expression as her eyes are always flinty.

The Musicians

There are three regular musicians, who make a good living from tips. Tess does not pay them, but she gives them free food and drink and allows them to share a bedroom if the tavern is not too full, and to sleep in the stables if it is.

Regular customers know them well, and will call for a particular musician depending on their mood.

Thomas

Thomas is an almost supernaturally beautiful young man with an excellent singing voice – *in a fantasy campaign he is an elf.* He plays sad songs and love songs on the harp with such feeling that he always brings the house down.

He is a great favourite with the ladies. He hints at a story of how he lost his true love and his proper place in the world. He is very vain regarding his voice and his appearance. He appears to be in his early twenties, but he has been singing in taverns for many years. Some suspect his mysterious past is all invented.

Melinda

Melinda is a local girl, of no particular beauty but with great musical talent. She can play any instrument, even one she has never seen before. She commonly plays three or four instruments over the course of an evening. Her preferred songs are old favourites and sing-alongs. Her singing voice is good, but she prefers to play a flute and accompany others.

She has no ambition at all, and having risen from being a kitchen assistant to her present status, she feels her life is complete so long as she is allowed to play for the regulars at the Dragon. She spends almost all her money on new

instruments, and sometimes announces that tonight will be the first appearance of the sitar, or the nose-flute. She stores her collection in the beer cellar.

Gretel

Gretel is in her early thirties. She is intelligent and brave. She used to be an acrobat in a circus, before a terrible accident left her paralysed from the waist down. She tells wonderful stories, plays a lute, and can play or sing almost any style of music. She can make customers laugh or cry and her sincerity can be contrasted with Thomas's. If there are children present she will sometimes juggle, but she does not like to talk about her old life with the circus. Occasionally she will be visited by old friends – she is ideally placed to be part of a spy ring.

Smuggling

There can be no doubt to the eagle-eyed obdserver that The Golden Dragon is involved in smuggling. Not only are there plenty of smugglers to be seen among the regulars, but it might also become apparent that the inn smuggles in goods for its own use and resale, through the secret underground waterway to the Contraband Cellar.

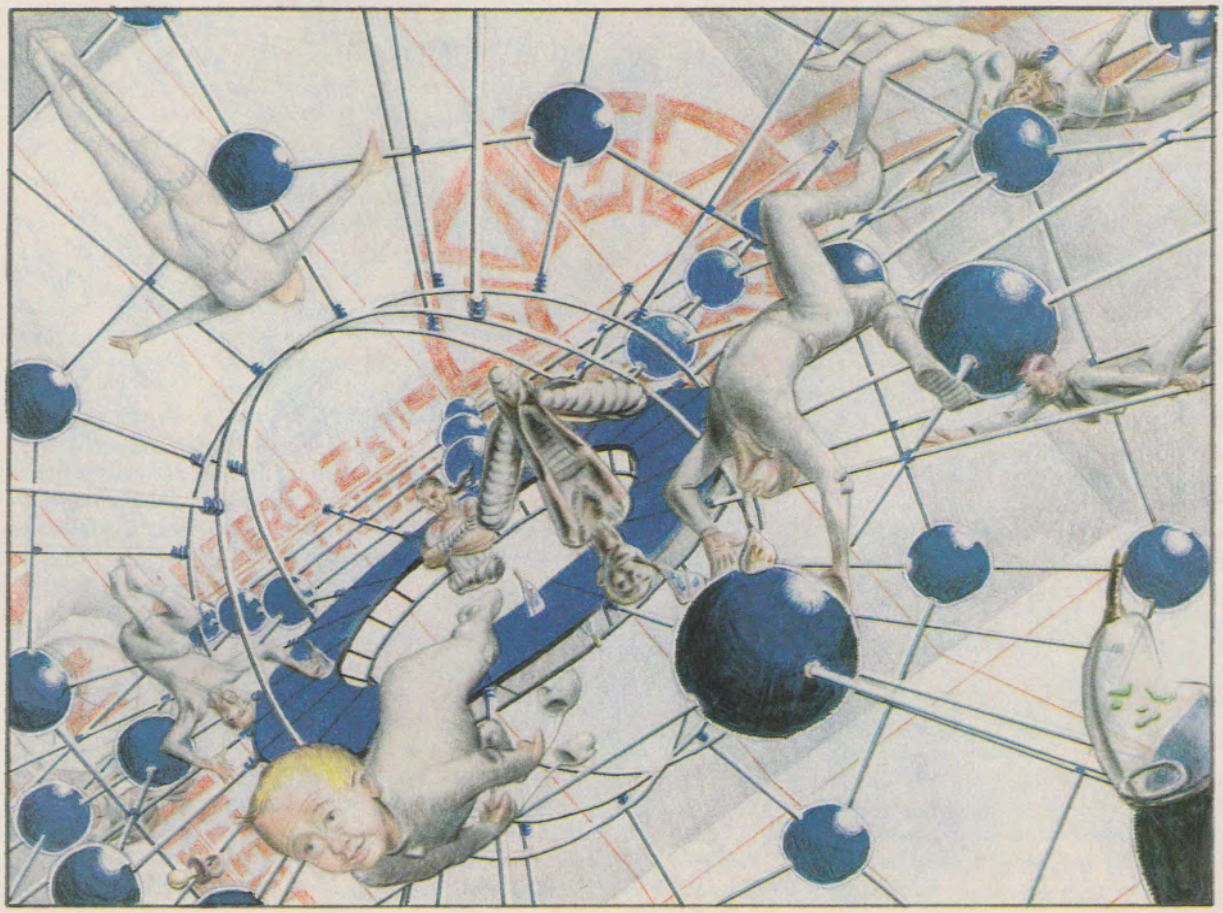
What is being smuggled naturally varies depending on the nature of your campaign. Brandy, wine, lace and tobacco are traditional – but it can be anything which is illegal or on which there is a heavy tax. In a cyberpunk or future game it may be cybertech, or drugs, or alien technology.

In any setting, it may be something as harmless as a fabric, or as dangerous as weapons.

The party's attitude to the smuggling will again depend on the campaign, their characters and the nature of the goods being smuggled. If a GM wants to surprise a very law-abiding party into approving of smuggling, they could be asked to investigate a "notorious haunt of smugglers" only to find out that the Dragon is a station on an 'underground railway' smuggling slaves away from their masters. In this scenario the slaves would live for a while in the Contraband Cellar, waiting for their ship.

Alternatively, for a party that are an outrageous bunch of law-breakers, the smuggling could be made as disagreeable as possible – addictive drugs, or mind-control technology.

It is always difficult to determine the nature and contents of the barrels without opening them and leaving incriminating traces. In a space setting, the "barrels" might be sealed containers with the same evidential problems – or even worse ones. It may be impossible to re-seal them, or they may contain exotic or even poisonous atmospheres.



Adventure Possibilities

• The party have a meeting in Room 3 and overhear something they shouldn't in Room 2. They escape via the trapdoor into the cellars and discover the smuggling operation.

• While investigating smuggling, the party wake an alien who was being kidnapped – either against their will or by it – in cold sleep.

• The pictures in the bedrooms are being stolen. Tess asks the party to investigate. It turns out that the nameless artist who painted the pictures has become posthumously very famous and the pictures are being stolen by a collector, or a gang. Alternatively, maybe the pictures, if put together, reveal the location of a fabulous treasure.

The Party in the Corner

In one corner of the bar sit three young men and one young woman, all dressed in a way that would be typical for the dock quarter if only they weren't quite so clean. They are aristocrats come slumming for the adventure, and they are having a great time.

The boys have come before, but this is the first time they have brought their spoilt sister. At the moment she's having a wonderful time, but if anything goes wrong she will make a terrific scene. She wants the freedom of a commoner but the respect due to an aristocratic lady. Anything can set her off – a drink accidentally spilt on her, any chance remark. Her brothers will avenge her perceived honour and suggest a duel.

Cap'n Eyes' shipmates

Captain Eyes is looking for recruits for an adventure in another port. She'll sell passage, or let them work their passage. This can be a scam either to get them away from where they are, or to get them somewhere else for an ulterior motive, or a genuine job.

The Zero-g Dragon

The inside of the Golden Dragon is like a spider's web, with lines taking you from the door to the bar and out to fuzzy spheres suitable to stick your drinking bulb on. The web extends in three dimensions throughout the space, right up the edge of the racks of sleeping cubicles. The walls are fuzzy too, and people hang there, talking, drinking, eating.

This is no place for a newcomer – if you can't handle yourself in Og or if you're fazed by people chatting while hanging heads together then this is not the place for you. There are lines free of "tables" for getting to and from the bar, and it is bad form to use the lines holding the "tables" together. Etiquette dictates that you make your way to the bar without disturbing anyone, and that you don't let go of anything – ever. Free floating objects not immediately snagged by their owner become property of Tess – and she sometimes gives them back for good behaviour.

Keys to sleeping cubicles (bigger ones contain lockers for storage), bulbs of drink and orders for food are taken at the bar. Smuggling goes on, the same as ever. The "cellars" are the side of the space station, and the "trapdoors" are airlocks.

Inn names

In some campaigns the party are always in and out of hostelries, and it isn't always easy to think of a new name on the spur of the moment. If stuck you can use any animal name combined with a colour, or use names of local pubs changed a little. Inns are often called after famous historical characters, or ships, and the names can be a way of giving PCs background information or a subtle clue.

They often have an official name and an unofficial name – "The Clan MacGregor" may be known locally as "The Fat Scot" and people may genuinely be confused if asked for directions to the official name. "The Two Zebras? Oh, you mean The Stripey Horses!" is the kind of detail that will establish the reality of the game. Here are some suggestions.

Traditional

The Unicorn's Horn • Igor's Bar and Grill • The Queen's Head • The Stripey Horses • The Fairy and Moonbeam • The Salamander • Captain and Kings • Black Diamond • The Naked Man • The Ostrich • The Bird and Baby • The Whittle • Wagon and Horses • Wizard and Dragon • Haymakers' Arms • The Basilisk Gaze

Future

The Bionic Arms • Hot Jets • The New Pseudopod • Far Stars • The Black Hole • Way Out Beer Cellar • O'Malley's • The Spaceship and Dragon • Shuttles Away • The Cyborg's Eye • Captain Freda • The Spacers' Bar • Come On Inn • The White Fguwksa • The Edge of the Rim

Bar prices

A pint of ale at the Dragon costs 1. That might be 1 gold piece, 1 pound, 1 credit, 1 penny – work out your own conversion rates – but the rest of the prices are based on that...)

.

Ale (pint), Wine (glass), Spirits (measure) – 1
Wine (bottle = 6 glasses) – 4
Fruit-juice (half pint) – 1
Milk (pint) – 5
Meal (minimum) – 2
Loaf of Bread – .5
Meal (sumptuous) – 7
Private Room (per hour) – 5
Bedroom (per room/night) – 25
Big Bedroom (including breakfast for 2) – 30

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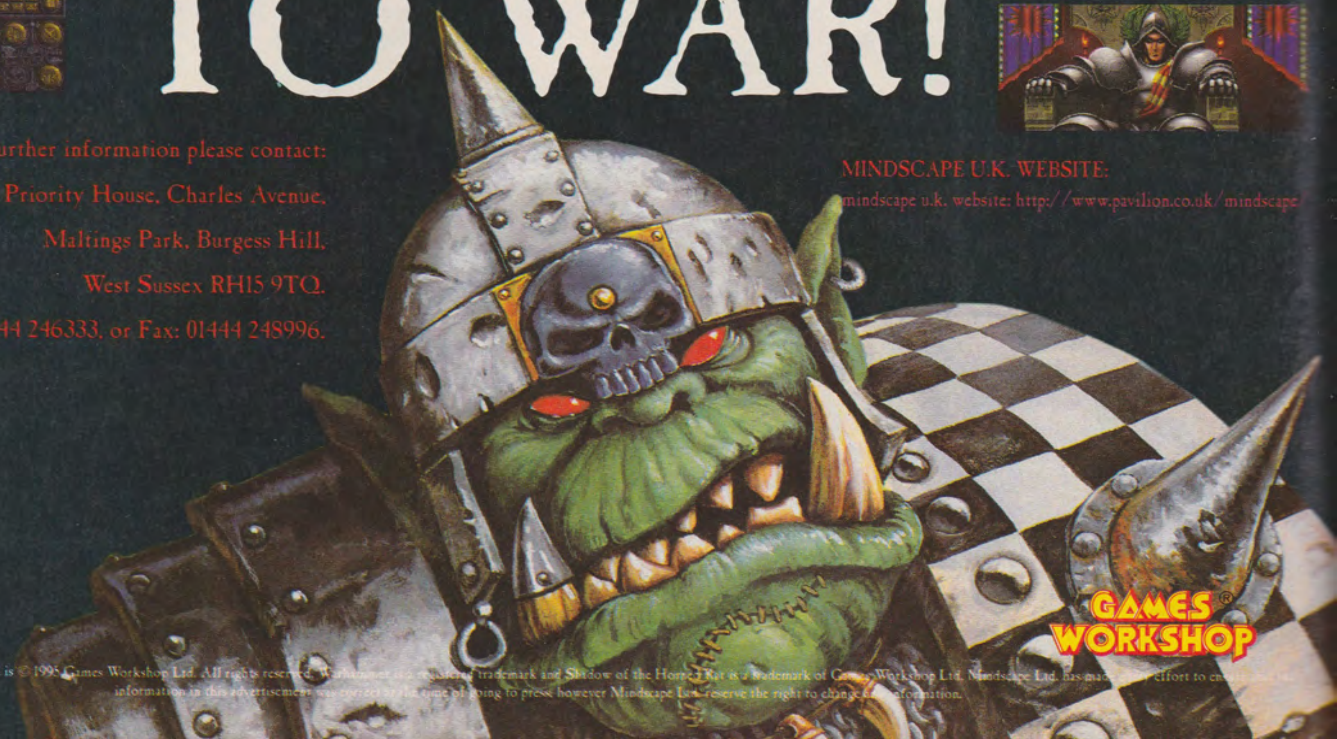

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arcane reviews

The wheel turns again...

Welcome to another month crammed with new releases and another massive collection of **arcane** reviews as we hurtle towards Christmas. In case you missed our debut issue last month, we aim to review honestly and fairly all the major roleplaying, CCG and related game releases so that you don't waste your hard-earned cash on buying rubbish.

To that end, our reviews are written by experienced gamers and independent, professional journalists; people who play the games you do. We're not owned by a games company, and we can't be bought by bribery or by advertising revenue. So if you want to read definitive reviews of games and expansions, you've come to the right place. Welcome to **arcane.**

(And while you're here, a note about prices. A lot of stuff reviewed in **arcane** is imported from the USA by a number of different distributors, so the prices we've given must be viewed as guidelines only. Nobody's perfect...)

"When you start to use this system you realise it is superb."
Skills & Powers
Page 60

"Virtually everyone is an employee, and there's no clocking off at five."
Warzone
Page 68

The icons

Each review in **arcane** is identified with a rather nifty icon showing what kind of game it is. Here's what they mean:

Roleplaying systems

Collectable card games and expansions

Board games, miniature systems

Dice games and expansions

Computer games and utilities

Books and supplements

The Scores

Everything reviewed in **arcane** gets a mark out of 10. Here's a guide to what the individual marks represent...

Score 10/10 Perfect. There's simply nothing better.
Score 9/10 Excellent; a classic. Highly recommended.
Score 8/10 Very good, with few problems. Recommended.
Score 7/10 Good, but not exceptional.
Score 6/10 Above average, but not without problems.
Score 5/10 Average, or a mixture of good and bad.
Score 4/10 Below average, but not without merit.
Score 3/10 Poor, crucially flawed in some way.
Score 2/10 Very poor; should be avoided.
Score 1/10 Appallingly bad, no redeeming features at all.

arcane seal of approval

Every month we pick just one thing and say: we think you should buy it. It's going to make us argue with each other, but we'll do it. For you.

The index...

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Player's Option:

Skills & Powers

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Yet more rules and character classes for AD&D? This had better be good...

Don't know about you, but one of my favourite aspects of *AD&D* is the creation of characters. So a new set of rules that further fleshes out character abilities and at the same time gives players more control over their selection is always going to be a good bet to receive a warm welcome.

If you read last month's *Out Of The Closet* feature about the origins of *AD&D*, you'll know that the game started off with only three classes – fighters, magic users and clerics – and that subsequent classes were added as the game evolved.

Until, eventually, things started getting a little out of hand. I mean – an acrobat class, fer chrissakes?

Although you might suspect that *Skills & Powers* is going to do nothing but further confuse the situation, it in fact does the opposite.

All of the character abilities you can think of, along with plenty of new ones, are brought together into a number of groups and given 'character point' values.

Abilities can then be 'bought' by characters, with just two provisos: the player must have the required number of points (different quantities of points are available at different stages of the character creation process); and the player has to ensure that the group to which an ability belongs is available to the class and race of the character.

For example, the laying on hands ability is available only to paladins, but a paladin could forsake the ability and save the points for, say, a juggling proficiency. Likewise, the traditional limitations of certain classes (no edged weapons for clerics, or metal armour for magic users) can be overcome by spending points.

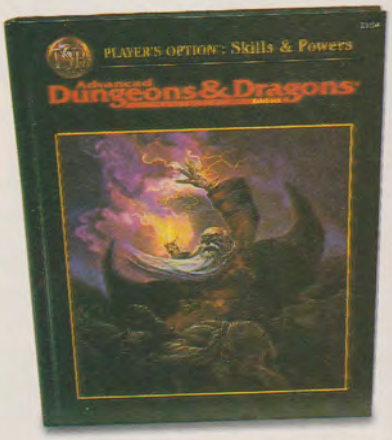
The customisation process doesn't end there, though. *Skills & Powers* presents several new ways of rolling your initial set of six stats, and then provides extra rules to enable you to alter them.

Each ordinary stat is broken down into a pair of sub-stats – so strength becomes a mix of 'stamina' and 'muscle', dexterity becomes 'aim' and 'balance', intelligence translates to 'reason' and 'knowledge', and so on.

"This system is superb. Abilities are still largely determined by luck, but players gain far more control"

Occasional mundanity is an occupational hazard for a book like this, which means comments like "A lizard man is a reptilian humanoid" or "Rogues are scoundrels, living by their wits" are only to be expected.

Apart from the usual mixed quality of illustration we now expect from TSR, this is a well-presented guide: all the information is easily accessible. But of course it's the content that counts...

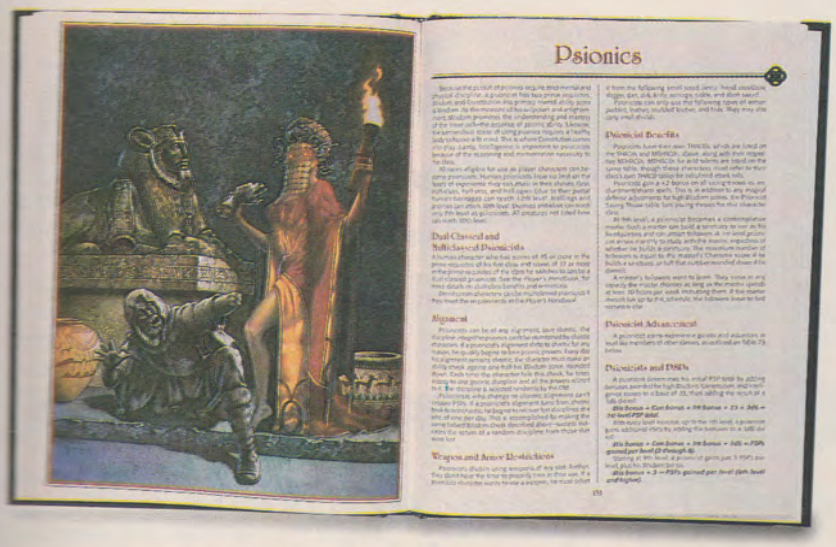


No new abilities are introduced at this stage, but all the existing stat-based abilities of a character now start to depend on one or other of the sub-stats. For instance, a character's stamina determines his weight allowance, while his muscle rating determines all the interesting things such as attack and damage adjustments.

Once you've got a value for your strength stat, you assign it to both sub-stats, and then you can tweak them. For every point by which you raise one sub-stat, you must lower the other, but never so that more than four points separate the pair, and never so that a score exceeds the racial maximum.

In practice, this means that even the roll of a measly 14 enables you to up your muscle power to 16 to gain a +1 on damage, and downgrade your stamina to a harmlessly wheezing 12.

Similarly, a wizard, when distributing his intelligence points, is faced with the dilemma of favouring his ability to learn spells, or the maximum number and level of spells he may cast.



Character points (make prizes...)

One of the main mechanisms of the new *Skills & Powers* rules are character points (CPs), which are given to a player at character generation time and can be used to buy abilities.

An initial number of points is given when character race is decided; these are supposed to be used to buy racial abilities (for instance, elves begin with 45 CPs but must spend 10 to gain infravision) but some can be saved.

Choosing a character class gives the player further CPs that can be used to purchase class-specific abilities (rangers can buy pass without trace, wizards can buy an extra-spell bonus) or again kept over for the next stage.

And the next stage is non-weapon proficiencies. The CP count is again topped up here, depending on character class, and the points can be spent on a variety of proficiencies (swimming, riding) and traits (ambidexterity, immunity to poison). Interestingly, characters can take disadvantages (cowardice, fear of magic) in return for extra CPs to spend – this also adds more roleplaying fun.

Finally, remaining CPs are expended on weapon proficiencies, with costs depending on character classes. Proficiencies can be improved by the expenditure of further points. Some CPs can be saved for use during the game proper, to be spent giving a player a second chance on a critical dice roll, and are augmented when the character rises a level, at which time extra skills can be bought.

When you start to use this system, you realise it's superb. Character abilities are still largely determined by the luck of the dice, and yet players are able to gain much more control over which abilities they wish to favour. And all without upsetting the tried-and-tested balance of the *AD&D* stats system.

It doesn't stop there, either. The book contains a whole host of options to further focus a character's abilities and background. There's a table you can use to determine the event that sent your character out into the world of adventure – witnessed a crime, joined the circus, that sort of thing – and a collection of lots of different 'character kits' that you can use to determine social rank and to influence abilities.

The kits range from acrobat (no longer a class itself, thank goodness, but a set of abilities and a background additional to an ordinary class) through barbarian to weapon master. Four new schools of magic are introduced, and the psionics system is given a revamp.

Character generation is admittedly much more complex and time-consuming with these new rules but if, like me, you enjoy creating characters, then this will be a bonus rather than a problem.

What's more, the result is much greater player choice without letting characters get grossly out of hand. And once the character has been generated, it's no more difficult to play or referee than a character of the old school.

Although *Skills & Powers* will appeal particularly to players who'd like their characters to take on the abilities of specific heroes from literature, anyone who wants to make their characters stand out from the crowd will simply love it.

Cliff Ramshaw

Skills & Powers owes its existence to the efforts of two experienced designers: Doug Niles, who worked extensively on *Forgotten Realms* and the *Player's Handbooks*, and Dale Donovan, who is a former editor of *Dragon* magazine. They are both known to be American.

Artist Fred Fields, whose artwork adorns our cover (and page 40 of *Skills & Powers*), gave up a steady career in advertising to work for TSR. And he was born in Hawaii.

And the players said...

ANDY: "Nice ideas, but are they worth all the hassle of having all those sub-stats, extra kits and other complexities?"

STEVE: "I like it a lot. But it's come about twelve years too late for me."

RICH: "This has to be the best thing that's ever happened to *AD&D*."

JON: "Yeah. This is great."

Score 9/10

A Sourcebook For Werewolf: The Apocalypse

Freak Legion

A players guide to Fomori

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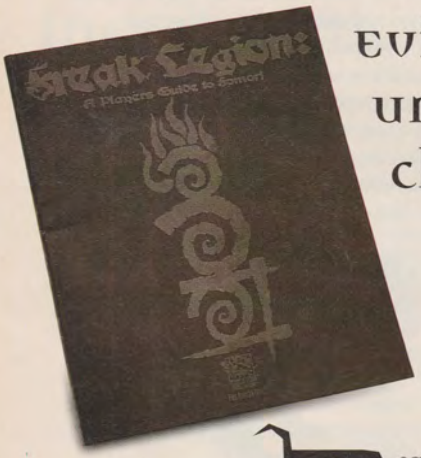


evil servants of the wyrm, or tragic unfortunates deserving pity? now's your chance to look at the fomori anew.

Fomori have been an integral part of the World Of Darkness ever since the arrival of *Werewolf: The Apocalypse*. Created when a person is possessed by a Bane spirit, these corrupt monsters were the Wyrm's footsoldiers in its war of destruction and decay.

Since then they've popped up in supplements and scenarios, even acting as servants of the evil Nephandi in *Mage*. *Freak Legion* takes an in-depth look at Fomori – and allows gamers to play one of the 'Wyrm's chosen'.

After a suitably unpleasant (and, thankfully, black and white) comic strip, *Freak Legion* is divided into six chapters, along with an introduction and appendix. The introduction begins with a 'Reader Advisory' warning of the book's content and attitude, which is just as well – but I'll come back to that later.

In the World Of Darkness, the 'Black Dog Game Factory' is a twisted version of the White Wolf Game Studio – a Pentex controlled company that produces roleplaying games designed to corrupt young minds. White Wolf uses the label for its more mature releases.

As with *Werewolf 2nd Edition*, *Freak Legion* begins with a comic strip that acts as an introduction to the setting of the game. Of course, given the nature of the book, it's not a very pleasant story....

Chapter one deals with character creation, using the standard White Wolf priority system. After being possessed by a bane, a fomor gains a number of fantastic abilities, or Powers. A player is free to choose as many of these as they wish. Unfortunately, there's a downside to becoming a twisted creature of evil – the process of possession always results in some degree of corruption.

In game terms this is represented by Taints. Each Power has a points cost, and the total cost of all the chosen Powers must be balanced by an equal value of Taints. The chapter ends with an expanded list of both Powers and Taints, which range from fairly mundane (claws or addictions) to very nasty (see 'Don't say we didn't warn you...')

Chapter two covers breeds – certain Banes tend to create similar fomori, and several of the more common results are detailed, along with suggested Powers, Taints and roleplaying notes.

"As the introduction says, they had fun writing this, and it shows"

The chapter ends with a discussion of fomorach, ultra-powerful fomori that tend to have life-spans measured in hours or days. Chapter three then deals with supernatural fomori – the results of a Bane possessing a vampire, werewolf or whatever. Again, examples are given, along with new powers and specific rules.

The remaining chapters discuss recruitment (details of some of the Pentex-owned groups that actively attempt to create more fomori), fomor society (poorly developed at best) and storytelling. The appendix covers Banes that commonly possess human hosts.

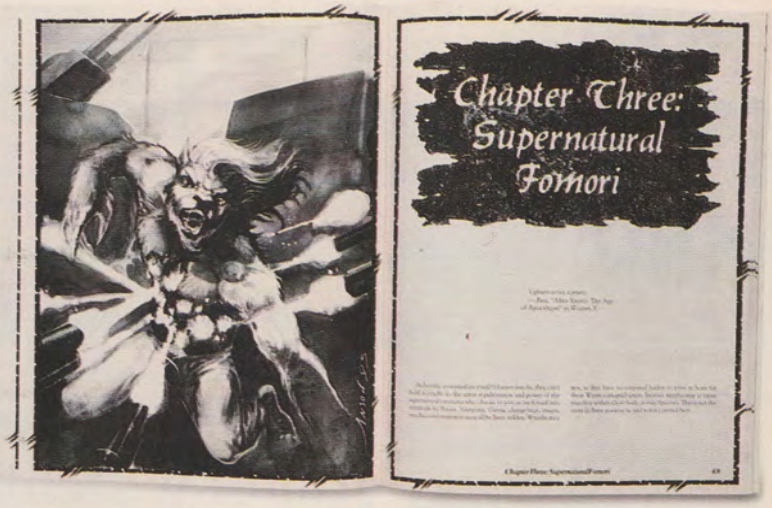
Physically, *Freak Legion* is an attractive book. The cover uses the same black on black and, as with most White Wolf books, the interior layout is clear, if uninspired, let down slightly by a few poor illustrations. The writing is likewise fairly typical of White Wolf, being clear and full of examples, if slightly overdone at times. Thankfully the pomposity is kept to a minimum – as the introduction says, they had fun writing this, and it shows.

Which leads to my main reservations about *Freak Legion*. Despite its subtitle, this book actually serves a dual purpose. It's a player's guide, but it's also a tool for referees who want to add more detail to the fomori in their games.

In this second capacity it succeeds well, and allows you to create a nearly limitless number of hideous opponents for your players. In addition, the background material contains some interesting ideas for stories, as well as reinforcing the utterly evil nature of Pentex.

It's in its role as a players' guide that *Freak Legion* causes some concern. Although most White Wolf games involve playing a 'monster', they are monsters with an altruistic or noble cause – vampires fight to maintain their humanity, werewolves to save the earth from ecological disaster and so on. Fomori, on the other hand, have virtually no redeeming features.

They exists simply to serve the Wyrm and die (often in quick succession). There's no hope for a fomor, no chance of redemption. Even those that manage to hold on to a fragment of their humanity are normally just driven insane by it.



Fancy playing a Werewolf possessed by a Bane? Anyone with a masochistic streak will find the relevant rules here.

Many of the Powers and Taints in *Freak Legion* seem to have been inspired by the excesses of Japanese Manga films, especially those featuring daemons of one kind or another – which, let's face it, is most of them.

I can see the point in maybe running a one-off story with players in an existing campaign – it could serve as a useful counterpoint to their usual characters' views, letting them see things 'from the other side'. Anything of a longer nature, though, would be somewhat dubious. You might even say, morally repugnant.

On a more mundane level, there are some further criticisms. *Freak Legion* assumes a good knowledge of the World Of Darkness, and often refers to other supplements, especially the *Book Of The Wyrm*. There's also a fair amount of repetition of previously published material, and the background sections concentrate almost exclusively on Pentex fomori. It would've been interesting to see more discussion of uncontrolled fomori, and those that serve the Nephandi.

For experienced World Of Darkness referees – especially those with a regular Werewolf group – *Freak Legion* has a lot to offer. It's not exactly required reading, and definitely not for the squeamish or easily offended. But if you're on the lookout for something that's a little different (or a lot more yucky) to pit against your players, there's a lot on offer here.

Andy Butcher

Score 7/10

Don't say we didn't warn you...

In common with just about everything released under the Black Dog label, *Freak Legion* carries a 'For Adults Only' warning. This is not just due to the mature nature of roleplaying a doomed monster, however. *Freak Legion* also includes some pretty unpleasant stuff, especially in the Powers and Taints sections. Here are a few examples...

Savage Genitalia

"The fomor (regardless of gender) has genitals with some menacing feature." The description for this Power then goes on to make some suggestions (most of which involve words like 'thorns', 'barbs', 'teeth' and 'ripping') which are probably best left to your imagination.

Skittersight

"This Power allows the fomor to pull out her eyes, twist the optic nerves into feet, and send the eyes scurrying down hallways and around corners..." Just in case you're interested, the text then describes the Willpower roll required to pull out your own eyes (complete with a reduction in difficulty for "frequent users") and discusses what happens if the eyes get squashed.

The Crusties

"Think of the worst case of dandruff you've ever seen. Now imagine it over the entire body and multiply its severity a hundred times." For three to ten days every month, the hapless creature's skin crusts up and flakes off in large brownish chunks. This Taint often affects fomori with the Slobber Snot Power (you don't want to know, trust me).

Mutoid Cancer

"In the second week, the change is far more pronounced. Blotchy skin gives way to a seething, growing patchwork of scabs, running sores and rolling muscle." A particularly extreme Taint, this viral disease runs in cycles lasting for about a month, followed by a month's break. During the course of the disease the victim physically grows in size and strength, eventually reaching an unstable level and a "cataclysmic cellular explosion". Yummy.

Dandanon

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what is 'realism' in a roleplaying game? wytchlight think they have the answer, but they may be wrong...

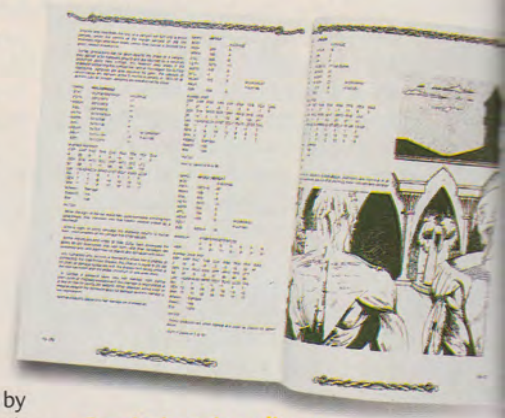
Perhaps the production quality leaves a little to be desired, but that's missing the point. *Dandanon* comes from a small troupe of roleplay enthusiasts, bravely taking on the big corporations by publishing their own rule system. Also, they hail from arcane's home town of Bath. So hurrah, and all that kind of stuff.

Designed primarily as "a system for universal roleplaying", *Dandanon* claims to offer a new level of realism in roleplaying games. Its selling point is that it supposedly does away with the wargame inheritance of rounds and movement phases, substituting a continuous time-flow in combat.

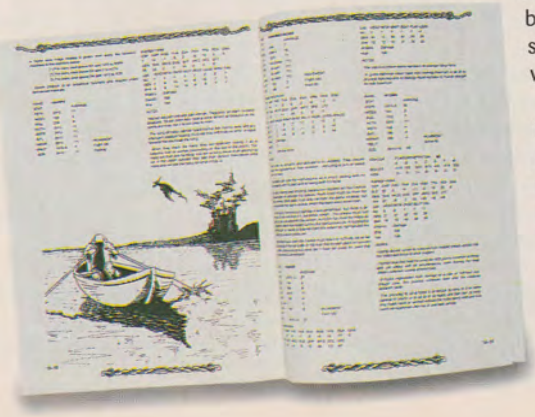
All combat options are assigned a particular speed, so that you can calculate – if you're so inclined – what's happening segment by segment (where one segment is a tenth of a second). So if a monster's total Combat Speed is 15, it can attack on the 15th seg, the 30th seg, the 45th seg, and so on. A surprised adventurer with a faster 'CSP' of 10 might lose initiative at the start, but would soon catch up on blows exchanged.

It's the issue of realism that is initially the most interesting aspect. The way *Dandanon* attempts to provide its realism is with a combat system that you can play at different levels of complexity – the most complex, complete implementation being a hex-based skirmish wargame. The philosophy is to provide some kind of mechanism for handling every predicted aspect of battle – the mechanism might be a variable, a base skill or a table – which should ensure that you know what's going on in fine detail.

Now this amount of detail is fine in theory, but when you put it into practice you quickly get bogged down by the book-keeping. Having a multitude of character stats, adjustments and TLAs (three letter abbreviations) is not in itself necessarily a bad thing, but in *Dandanon* it doesn't actually save time.



Despite its universality, an established *Dandanon* gameworld is implicit in the rules. Insufficient data for starting a campaign, but over-elaboration of particulars like money and goods.



What's in the book?

In case the idea of a generic system confuses you, here's what *Dandanon* offers.

Character generation assumes a mediaeval fantasy setting and has racial adjustments for Elves, Halflings and 'the usuals'.

Combat is the focus of the book, with helpful examples of gameplay illustrating the myriad factors at work.

Skills are bought in a points system sensibly related to physical and mental attributes. Players can specialise in many subjects listed, with a neat and simple idea that allows re-rolls for each grade of expertise.

Magic is ordered into the four schools of Sorcery, Theomancy (religious magic), Evocation and Enchantment. Hundreds of spells are listed for these disciplines, covering details of casting time, range, cost and material components. Again, a points system determines their acquisition.

A Bestiary of monsters and mythical creatures is also thrown in, and the book concludes with a sample scenario.

If you can't find it in your local shop, you can order *Dandanon* by mail order from WYTCHLIGHT 49 SLADEBROOK RD SOUTHDOWN BATH, AVON BA2 1LP.

Orders within the UK cost £13.95 inclusive of post and packing. Orders from North America, Canada and Australia cost £18.95 sterling. Other overseas customers should pay £16.95 sterling. Make your cheques payable to 'Wytchlight'.

Most weapons have several modes of attack, and this requires the players to calculate new adjustments in the combat speed, weapon bands, to hit percentage, penetration chance and damage for every single swing of a sword. Moving, turning, casting a spell, bleeding from a wound – all are assigned a certain speed. If you know it as well as the designers, it may be easy enough to deal with, but our playtesters were frankly intimidated.

Of course, you have to ask yourself how much realism you actually want in your fantasy. One of the tenets of *Dandanon* is that real-life combat is dangerous and deadly, and should be portrayed as such. Using these rules, a referee would have to be extremely cautious and occasionally fudge the rolls to prevent characters dying mid-campaign in the most innocuous of encounters.

That might be acceptable in a certain flavour of game, perhaps, but I would suggest that realism is achieved through the agreed interpretation of events by the participants, not by using lengthy tables of critical wounds for each body part.

The creative freedom of roleplaying means that players will always surprise you with actions that aren't covered by your system: *Dandanon* doesn't happily accommodate such improvisation.

Further, I'm also forced to take issue with the makers' claims of universality. In many respects *Dandanon* is startlingly reminiscent of FGU's *Lands Of Adventure*, the game spawned by the infamous American APA *Alarums and Excursions*, which was the first to cause ripples in the gaming community by claiming to be a generic, modular system.

Not only is *Dandanon* charmingly old-fashioned but also, just like *Lands of Adventure*, it fails to be truly generic because there are too many assumptions and opinions built into the rules.

Try to steer away from the stock sub-Tolkien medieval fantasy milieu, or a *D&D*/Vancian magic system, and you might as well devise your own game for all the work it's going to take.

In fairness, the author does take great pains to stress the importance of skipping what you don't like and compromising whatever threatens to slow down play.

If you have any interest in system creation then I do urge you to look at *Dandanon*. It does have its merits, and it will certainly cause those fretting over 'realism' to ask themselves a few questions. But in truth, this system is not an inspired or friendly affair.

Yes, I feel like a heel. They even invited me round their house for a game. And I'll probably bump into them in the high street. Sob.

Zy Nicholson

"You have to ask yourself how much realism you actually want in your fantasy"

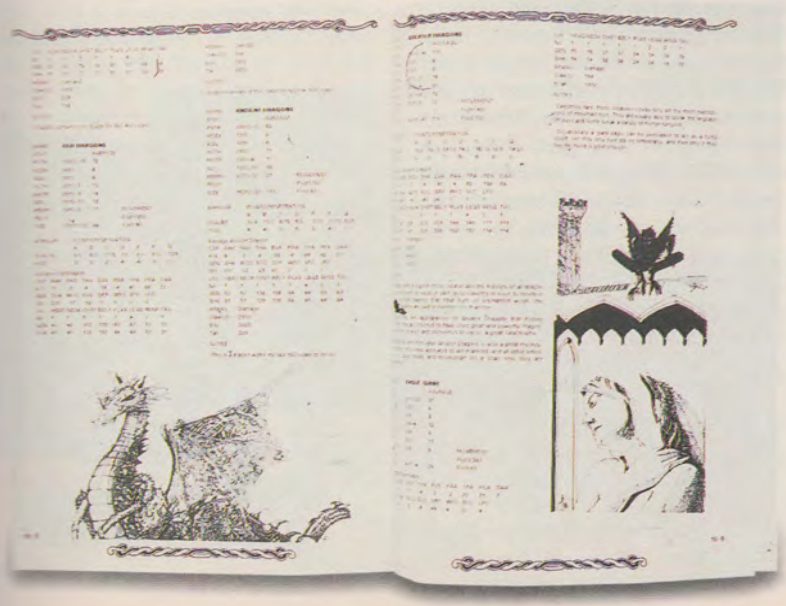
If you have access to that crazy techno Rotary Club they call the Net, you might like to know that Wytchlight now have their own web site up and running. Direct your browser to http://www.cs.man.ac.uk/~jacquesa/dandanon/index.html.

And the players said...

DAVE: "Can we get back to the story? We've spent more time fighting mini-battles than following the plot."

GEOFF: "The timeflow's a good idea, but it's too awkward. The game doesn't strike me as more realistic."

HAIRY: "I reckon you need a computer program to handle the fights. Want to borrow my laptop?"



Dandanon's Spell Index features such thaumaturgic wonders as Hair Growth, Shades, Contraceptive, Squirrel Transformation and the excellent Regenerate Minor Extremity.

Score 4/10

Marvel Overpower

Starter Deck £6.99 **Booster Pack £1.99**

Fleer Entertainment Group **001 609 231 6200** **Out now**

It's the grudge match of the year — overpower vs wildstorms...

There're two things that make *Marvel Overpower* one of the better card games I've seen. The first is that it's simple and easy to learn. You'll pick it up during the first game and never have to play any 'open-hand' games. Each pack has four superheroes who are rated on a scale of one to eight in three attributes; strength, fighting and energy.

Fleer Entertainment is actually a subsidiary of Marvel. Small world eh? Ahem.

"All the cards you need to play are in the deck you buy"

The Thing, for example, has energy (1), fighting (4) and strength (8). The object of the game is to knock all your opponents out. To make an attack you use Power Cards (each is rated from one to nine and corresponds to one of the three attribute types). You play one with a value equal to or less than one of your character's attributes. The Thing can use a strength (8) card to make an attack, but not an energy (5), for instance. Your opponent has a chance to block, which he can do by matching the number (not necessarily the type) with his own Power Cards. There are also some special cards that add bonuses or give special attacks to characters and there are enough of these to keep the otherwise rather basic game interesting. Deal twenty points to a hero and he is knocked out. Do this to all of your opponents and the game is over.

There's a total of 388 cards in the set to collect, including 39 different superheroes.

On the far left is an energy power card. Underneath is one of Cyclops' special cards.

The second great thing about *Overpower* is that all the cards you need to play a game are in the pack you buy. The decks are set up ready for you to play with the perfect mix of characters and action cards. This makes *Overpower* a great value for money game – one deck and you're playing. It is possible to build stronger ones, but you'd have to go a long way. The decks come in teams; Storm, Gambit, Rogue and Bishop in one; Thing, War Machine, Spider-Woman and Thor in another, for example, and there are four other teams to get.

Booster packs of other cards are also available. These, in common with all other CCGs are random, which in this case means that there's a huge leap from just buying a pack and playing with it to becoming a collector. Because of the way that each character has four special cards that only they can use, you're going to have to buy a lot of booster packs before you get a hero that you can actually include in your line-up. Given that the booster packs are the only way to get hold of such old favourites as Wolverine and Spidey, this is a problem.

The biggest criticism that can be levelled against the game however, is that there's a lack of depth and substance. Once you've learnt to play the battle game described above, you can advance to the mission game, which involves using the seven mission cards that come with each deck to gamble with. Every 'round' you and your opponent choose how many to gamble with. Win enough rounds and you'll win the game. This sounds very simple, but does add a pleasing depth to the game, reminiscent of poker. Unfortunately it isn't enough to make *Overpower* superb. This *is* a good game, but not one you'll be playing over and over again.

Steve Faragher

Score 7/10

WildStorms

Starter Deck £7 15 **Card Booster Pack £2**

WildStorm Productions **001 619 551 1164** **Out now**

...or Marvel vs Images, the breakaway comics company. who wins? Read on.

There are 350 cards in the limited edition of WildStorms, plus 12 ultra-rare Chase cards, distinguished by their gold logo.

Even though both are based on popular comic titles, these two games are complete opposites. Where *Overpower* has an impressive (if limiting) simplicity, *WildStorms* is a lot more complex.

The game can be played in two ways – as a basic Battle, or a longer Campaign, which consists of a series of Battles. A Battle is fought over a specific Battlesite card, and is played in turns. On your turn you can recruit Characters from your hand, play Equipment cards on them and attack any enemy characters. During an attack, you and your target can both play Combat cards, if desired, and any player can play Plot Twist cards at any time. The first player to earn the number of points listed on the Battlesite card being fought over wins. In a Campaign game, you try to be the first to reach a predetermined number of points. Winning an individual Battle gives you a Prize card to use in future battles of the Campaign.

Every card in *WildStorms* (except for Prizes and Battlesites) has a value. When you defeat a character, you earn points equal to its value. In addition, many Plot Twist cards allow you to earn points for achieving certain goals.

These points are also used when recruiting and equipping characters, and for constructing decks. When making a deck, the total value of all your cards must be equal to or less than a given number (200 for a battle game), and a certain number of those points must be Character and Equipment cards.

WildStorms is an uneven mixture of good ideas, often spoilt by poor implementation. The only unqualified good point is the art, which is stunning throughout. Image boasts some of the best artists in the business, and it shows.

That said, some things aren't as good. Take the points. One of the reasons for it is to even up play – you might have a load of rare (and powerful) cards, but you'll have to pay their higher costs to include them in your deck. Likewise, you can only bring one 10 point monster into play on a turn, but you can manage three smaller guys. Finally, it makes for sensible scoring – you earn a lot of points for taking out a tough character. In short, then, it's a good idea. Unfortunately it doesn't work that well. Many of the values are inconsistent, with two characters of vastly different power having the same cost. It also makes deck creation a laborious process that requires a calculator. Worst of all, the deck construction rules virtually guarantee that you can't make a legal deck from a starter pack – you'll need at least two of them.

"The only unqualified good point is the art"

In addition, some of the rules and many of the cards are confusing or unclear. This feels like a game that was rushed out without enough playtesting. There's the potential for a very good game here. Perhaps the revision preceding the Unlimited release early next year will fix things. Until then, it's best suited to collectors (for the art), or serious gamers who don't mind putting in the time to make it work.

Andy Butcher

Score 6/10

Image comics was formed by a group of artists and writers from Marvel who decided to go it alone.

Warzone

£15.95 Heartbreaker 0151 207 3737 (Gamecraft) Out now

A miniatures-based, techno-fantasy, squad level skirmish game, forged in the cataclysmic mythos of the Mutant Chronicles RPG.

Heartbreaker also produce a complete range of miniatures for *Mutant Chronicles* and *Warzone*. They are all available from Gamecraft, their UK distributors

In cosmic terms, you might say that the setting for this game is pretty domestic, because it's set entirely within our own solar system. Typically, humanity has found that intergalactic exploration is an empty experience in comparison to having a bitter barney over every asteroid that might be a source of iron or nickel.

On Earth, rampant capitalism is causing global turmoil as whole nations are made redundant and Humankind plc downsizes into five Megacorporations. Virtually everyone is an employee, and there's no clocking off at five, as the prime aim of each Megacorp is to establish total monopolies.

But the sharp practices of the corporations have attracted the attentions of the intergalactic liquidators – The Dark Legion, a chaotic conglomerate of Undead and creatures from another dimension who seek the extinction of humanity. Charming. Thus whilst the stock markets crash and city analysts are busy stuffing gold bullion under their mattresses, battle rages across the deserts of Mars, the jungles of Venus and the caverns of Mercury.

With a low peace-dividend forecast, the armed forces of the protagonists enjoy full employment. So there's plenty of scope for you to mobilise a force of human troops or raise a Dark Horde of necromutants and undead legionnaires.

There are complete army lists for all the major powers, with each list describing a range of weaponry, special forces, special abilities and tactics unique to that army.

Thus, you may represent the Megacorporation of Capitol: thinly disguised Americans, who specialise in defending liberty and democracy. They are a highly mobile army, not above requesting air strikes when things get a bit tricky.

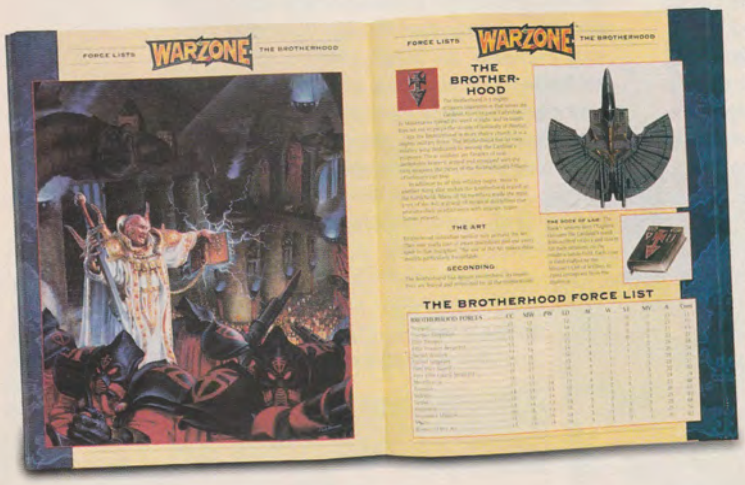
Or you could play Mishima (pseudo-Samurai with a penchant for assassination and kamikaze attacks), or the Prussian Bauhaus Corporation (who naturally possess all the best equipment), or the Imperial corporate raiders (a curious union of Her Majesty's Finest, and mad, claymore-wielding Highland maniacs). Finally, there is Cybertronic, a merger of cyborgs and Cuirassiers-battlebots devoid of emotion.

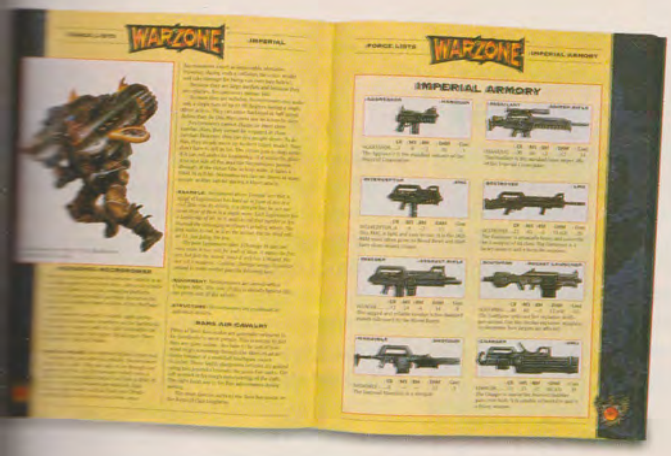
However, some humans take little comfort in the knowledge that they are defended by a range of artificially intelligent consumer durables. Instead they seek spiritual succour in the embrace of the Brotherhood. This is a huge, fanatical religious organisation that burns heretics, and crusades against The Dark Legion. You may field this sacred force, composed of Inquisitors, psychic Mystics and other zealots.

The one truly alien aspect of the game is the pact of the Dark Legion, servants of the five Dark Apostles. Mortgaging your soul to these Foul Ones drafts the foul minions of destruction, insanity, corruption, pestilence and the gift of the Dark Symmetry (Evil Psionics) into your portfolio.

In terms of gameplay, *Warzone* creates detailed, complex skirmishes, that are reasonably paced for forces of 20-25 troops a side. The mechanics owe much to the related roleplaying system, though they are simplified to deal with mass combat.

The D20 is the Supreme Arbitrator of events, which should give a clue to the level of detail involved. Play proceeds by alternate squads or heroes, with each model able to perform a sequence of actions (usually 3) per turn, and thereby grab a moment of glory. Actions include; moving, firing, aiming, hiding, infiltrating, spotting, waiting and giving orders. Thus, even a regular 'Grunt' can rapid fire his assault rifle three times, or do something cunning like move into position, snap off a shot and then hide.





Alternating the players' turns on every squad move creates some chaotic and confusing situations, evoking a dynamic, desperate and lethal firefight. But here's the trade-off. The range of options for each trooper makes *Warzone* tactically more skillful and challenging than a skirmish game like *Warhammer 40,000*, but the system can't cope with as many troops or as divergent a range of weaponry and equipment.

I also felt *Warzone* suffered from a few fundamental flaws. I found a number of procedures were irksome, like my opponent deciding where blast markers deviated when my missile launchers missed, but the reality gap that really had me spinning round the room, like some demented Dalek screaming, "Does not compute...!" was the close-combat system. For some reason, a trooper needs the same score to cuff a foe who is twice as hard as him, as he does to smack someone who is twice as weak. Another criticism is that the models on the table don't immediately represent the events on the battlefield. Because troops can hide anywhere, apparently by prudent use of uneven ground or tall grass, a killing zone of open tabletop can be infiltrated by hordes of enemy, unmolested. This rule leaves squads of models all over the place, which are standing audaciously in the open, but by virtue of a 'hidden' counter, are actually concealed. I prefer to keep counters to a minimum and, wherever possible, let the models' positions describe the scene. It's visually more appealing and plays faster.

"defended by a range of artificially intelligent consumer durables"

Heartbreaker, to their credit, have included 12 comprehensive army lists in the *Warzone* book

Unfortunately, for a novice trying to grasp this game, the hostile *Mutant Chronicles'* Universe extends to the rulebook. It is riddled with basic errors, including gameplay examples which contradict the rules they are attempting to explain. The manual isn't well-written, diagrams are rare and quick reference rules sheets, which can save oodles of time, are non-existent. Beyond that, committed *Mutant Chronicle* fans will be disappointed that the source material is basically cloned straight from the roleplaying book. Though extravagant, I found this material obtuse and stereotypical rather than archetypal, a reservation compounded by the largely uninspiring miniatures displayed in the book. The bad-ass image of Capitol special forces is rather depreciated by the wearing of baseball caps.

Expanding *Warzone* will be tricky. The army lists in the book have depth, but a truly representative force cannot be accommodated in a single game due to the system's complexity. And only the Dark Legion operates significantly differently from the rest. There are rule modifications for simplifying proceedings but they also detract from the game's strengths. A brief campaign system is provided for masochists who wish to heighten the anguish suffered when their heroes are shot; plus a section detailing skills and wargear for customising bullet-magnet leaders. Perhaps, most importantly for *Warzone*'s life expectancy, is a system for converting *Chronicles'* PCs to the skirmish scene while offering them insurance cover should something devastating happen.

For those with a few spare miniatures lying around; who are interested in dabbling in wargaming as an evening's diversion, without the trouble of investing in a huge army and a planet's worth of scenery, *Warzone* is worth investigating, especially if you already swear by the RPG. However, I wouldn't recommend it to serious megalomaniacs who live for wargaming.

Mark Donald

Score 6/10

And the players said...

CHRIS: "Some interesting points. I wouldn't rush out and buy it, though."

JAMES: "I'd use it in conjunction with the roleplaying game."

Avengers In Lankhmar

Comment line

£5.99 TSR 01223 212517 Out now

You are Alan Badel, the Columbo-esque detective in *Day Of The Jackal*. It's a desperate race against time as you scour Lankhmar to find Edward Fox, who in this instance is played by Elad Edals, Edals being the fugitive you hunted like Harrison Ford when you were Tommy Lee Jones in *Slayers Of Lankhmar* (or was that *The Fugitive*? I get confused).

Anyway, working with a timeline of events cross-referenced against street maps, the players – and three NPC competitor teams – search Lankhmar for Edals. The rogue's path and location at any time is fixed, but players are free to wander the city to look for clues or get totally and utterly side-tracked by the many splendid diversions that Lankhmar offers. If the party locate Edals or any of the other search teams, specific game conditions are outlined. Everything else is left to random rules and the imagination of the ref.

Running such an open system is fraught with danger, as even parties who have found all the clues can easily miss the finale. It's a risk worth taking, though, to experience *Avenger's* interwoven mini-scenarios running simultaneously.

Things happen in Lankhmar. It offers a quality cast of extras and, since everybody in Lankhmar knows a secret, is plotting something and has a deadly enemy, there is a ring of authenticity to the hubbub of suspicious whisperings that make the scenario a success.

The star is the fugitive assassin, Edals. His traps range from killjoying through plain annoying to the inspired, so characters never know if opening the next door will trigger a fireball or cause manure or some love potioned citizen to fall on them. And of course, no Lankhmar adventure would be complete without Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser.

With strong characters and combat, *Avengers* is a hectic and often confusing chase. The referee will be hard-pushed to keep track of who's where and who's doing what at which time, but then he knew the risks when he took the job. For players it's a refreshingly open scenario that is great fun to explore.

Trenton Webb **Score 9/10** →

AnimOuch!

Anime gaming

£6.95 CAWS 01276 23223

Out now

Japanese animation, or anime, has much in common with roleplaying. Dynamic action, melodramatic storylines, simple plot structures; it's no coincidence that at least one hit anime show (*The Legend of Lodoss War*) was itself derived from a roleplaying game. Though several games have been based on anime shows, no one till now has attempted a generic system – one that captures the feel, the dynamic, the zen of anime.

On that count at least, *AnimOuch!* by Steve Gill hits the spot. Essentially it's a miniatures skirmish game: the 48-page rulebook contains just 14 pages of system, with the remainder taken up by NPC stats, campaign hints, and tips on modelling. Normally, skirmish systems make terrible roleplaying games, but Steve Gill's game works because he obviously loves the subject and he keeps it simple.

Character creation is points-based, with most of the attributes and abilities being related to action and combat. Though far from elegant, the system gives referees plenty of latitude to interpret how purchased abilities work, making it flexible enough to fit any anime genre. A simple and appropriate skills system rounds out the game mechanics, which are easy to use and lots of fun.

Where the game fails to score is on presentation. This is not just a physically unappealing game, it's also somewhat inaccessible; the writing is dense and basic concepts are inadequately explained. Roleplaying hints are limited to a paragraph and the campaign notes for the different genres desperately need expanding.

Despite these problems, *AnimOuch!* is a delightful toolbox of tricks, containing all a resourceful referee needs to run an anime-style campaign. If you're prepared to invest the time to develop the background material, it could work for you.

Lee Brimmicombe-Wood **Score 7/**

Taint of Madness

£12.95 Chaosium 001 510 547 7681 Out now

unhinged. loopy. insane. nutty. mad. what's an investigator to do when he loses his marbles in call of cthulhu?

A Call of Cthulhu source book

Sanity is important in a *Call Of Cthulhu* campaign. Prolonged exposure to the horrors of the Mythos decreases a player's SAN and a character's mind can become so unhinged that a spell in a sanatorium is the only cure. Many of the shorter stories that Lovecraft wrote were set in asylums, and Chaosium's new *Taint Of Madness* source book deals with these places in exhaustive detail.

The idea is that rather than having a throw-away 'downtime' period, where a *CoC* investigator spends three months in a nut-house, recovers d20 SAN and then leaves, the time can be incorporated into the campaign. To this end, the source book lists and details all the recognised forms of insanity as well as their treatments. It also includes three fully developed asylums – Bethlehem for the 1890s, Arkham for the 1920s, and Bellevue for the 1990s.

The first section details the types of madness a character can fall victim to; schizophrenia, paranoia, sexual fetishes, bizarre eating disorders and even phobias (with oddities like ondontophobia, fear of teeth, and parthenophobia, a fear of young girls). Even minor phobias can have a dramatic effect in a scenario. Your character may be a good shot, you may be able to raise him from the dead, but if his legs turn to jelly at the sight of a root vegetable, he's no use to anybody.

After diagnosis, the second section deals with the psychiatric interview, which enables the referee to inform the players about their particular insanities and how these will affect their behaviour. *Taint Of Madness* offers suggestions on how to roleplay a typical patient session and includes visual props: a referee's worksheet, a cut-out-and-keep insanity certificate and some assorted Rorschach ink blots.

Finally, *Taint Of Madness* looks at insanity and the law. Obviously, most of the time characters will voluntarily commit themselves, but the last chapter explains why the law can commit characters against their will if it believes that they are (a) of unsound mind or (b) a danger to society.

This is followed by a brief run-down on all the major asylums in America and Europe, with an in-depth look at the three mentioned earlier, for which there are map layouts, character backgrounds, scenario ideas and a short sample adventure.

Taint Of Madness is an interesting, thought-provoking book and, like most of the *Cthulhu* add-ons, is crammed with information. But since most referees prefer to side-step the idle months between scenarios, it's not exactly an essential read.

Dean Evans

Score 6/10

Elminsters Ecologies: High Moor, Serpent Hills

An expansion for the AD&D Forgotten Realms campaign

£5.99 TSR 01223 212517

Out now

Everybody's green-conscious these days, even *AD&D* characters. This expansion details the ecologies of two adjacent locales in the Forgotten Realms campaign through the eyes of two NPCs. Bara is a female druid of th High Moor who can't resist an opportunity to give an ecology lecture as she describes the flora and fauna o her desolate domain, while the Serpen Hills are explained by the Lark of Suzail, a female magic user with a fear of – yes, you guessed it – snakes.

The crudity with which both personalities are enforced on the text makes it heavy going in places, but no less informative for that. We get to know all about the geography, weathe plants and animals of the areas before we come to the good stuff: details of the various monsters, how they're organised and the relationships between their tribes.

The High Moor is home to a number of humanoid groups, with a smattering of trolls, undead and dragons, while in the Serpent Hills you'll find just about every reptilian monster you can think of. Encounter tables are provided, but strangely no stats are given even for the NPC dragons.

Also without flesh on their bones are the ruins and dungeons hinted at in the rumours and legends sections that end both booklets. Rather, they're left to the referee to flesh out, which is all very well, but wouldn't it have been better to have more of this sort of thing and less about the different varieties of grass in the area?

Cliff Ramshaw **Score 5/10**

Crusader: No Remorse

A PC adventure game
£44.99 Electronic Arts/Origin
01753 549442 Out now

One of the annoying things about so much science fiction is that the baddies get all the cool equipment. I mean,

wouldn't it be more fun to be a Terminator? And which would you rather wear, those horrible orange jumpsuits of the Rebellion or the menacing black gear sported by TIE Fighter pilots?

Luckily, the developers at Origin have recognised this problem. *Crusader: No Remorse* takes place in yet another dystopian future ruled, this time, by a group of powerful corporations, the Consortium. The most highly trained of all Consortium troops are the Silencers, an elite force that, besides having a cool name, also gets to wear snazzy red body armour. The good news is that you get to play one of these guys. Of course, you're a Silencer who's turned against his masters and joined the resistance, but you still get to wear the cool armour.

Although *Crusader* is based on the same game engine as *Ultima VIII* and has a highly detailed background, the game itself is about action more than roleplaying. You're given missions to perform, which nearly always involve breaking into Consortium bases, killing any baddies that get in the way and stealing information or blowing things up. All jolly enjoyable.

The graphics are lovingly detailed SVGA throughout, the levels are vast and cleverly designed, and best of all, *Crusader* is one of those rare games that gives →

Planescape Monstrous Compendium Appendix II

£10.95 TSR 01223 212517 Out Now

what possible use is a book that describes itself as "ain't complete and isn't always right"? erm, a lot actually, unless you want to be a "deader."

Books are like wine, my old grandaddy used to say. The prettier the picture on the front, the worse the contents. Do you know what? He was completely and utterly wrong. *Appendix II* has a great cover and it's a top read, too.

Monster manuals, for that's what *Appendix II* is, are lists. Lists with pictures admittedly, but lists nonetheless. And like all lists they have a tendency to be dull and tedious things. The *Planescape* peeps have realised this and invested real effort in taking a list, pushing it through the necessary Argos catalogue stage of Monster Manuals and onwards to coffee table status.

The artwork of *Planescape* isn't exactly inspired but it does sport a coherence and consistency rarely seen in roleplaying books. There are no 'well it's a man's head on a chicken's body' Crimewatch photofit embarrassments that litter so many other manuals, tomes and handbooks.

You are given the feeling that the beasts here are individuals. The descriptions seem to stem from one-on-one encounters and common myths. These are not 'creature kits' to be culled straight from the page, but individual examples of a species. And as such they come complete with quirks and foibles, they are monsters with warts, if you will.

This theme is echoed in the text, which in the very first paragraph goes out of its way to encourage adventurers to use this book as a foundation rather than a work of reference. The language determinedly builds this atmosphere further in an attempt to get the reader in the mood for *Planescape* adventures. Most descriptions

feature quotes – which normally involve the quotee being horribly killed – to add flavour.

These elements make the 100 or so monsters, men and mutant killer elephants with wings (seriously) described within its pages more 'real'. These are creatures of the planes, and as such determinedly more fantastical and more dangerous than your regular, ho hum, every day kind of fantasy creature.

Their blend and balance is good; with a lively mix of the lawful and chaotic, the mighty and meek. The cultures of the Guardinal and Tanar'ri give the Planes a solid base of peoples, while the monstrous Astral Dreadnought and the Eater Of Knowledge populate their periphery with true terror. Then oddities like the Observer (a Beholder's second cousin on its mother's side) and the aforementioned Hollyphant are introduced to ensure that the planes maintain their very necessary bizarre flavour.

The *Appendix* does err slightly in favour of the more fearsome, more powerful creatures. The sheer fatality factor therefore precludes lower level characters from encountering them. Yet these beasts do not live in the spooky woods behind the town hall but in other worlds which require powerful magic to reach; so those with the power to visit should be able to take the knocks.

Trenton Webb

Score 8/10

Entomorph: Plague of the Darkfall

£44.99 Mindscape/SSI 01444 246333 Out now
PC 486, 8MB RAM, SVGA, CD-ROM & Windows

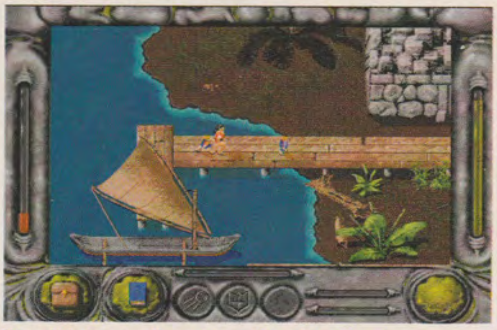
As the evil power of the Darkfall spreads across SSI's new world of Aden setting, things start getting a little transformational...

Entomorph is the second game in SSI's new line of computer roleplaying games. It casts you as Squire Warrick, a young adventurer who returns to his native island to discover that his older sister is missing. Your quest to find her takes you to the large island of Phoros, where the insidious evil of the Darkfall is manifesting in a particularly horrific manner – the people are slowly becoming giant insects.

In sharp contrast to *Thunderscape*, the first game in the series, *Entomorph* is played from a slanted overhead view. Likewise, where *Thunderscape* involved a party of characters, each with detailed skills and attributes, in *Entomorph* Warrick is your only character, and the numbers are very simple.

Entomorph is well presented, with finely detailed SVGA graphics throughout and a suitably unsettling soundtrack complimented by a range of 'squishy' sound effects. The game is easily controlled via the mouse and keyboard, giving the whole thing a very pleasant 'arcade adventure' feel.

Although fans of detailed statistics will be disappointed, this simplicity allows you to concentrate on the story of the game, which quickly develops from a straightforward monster bash to a complex web of different plotlines. Combat, puzzle-solving and limited character interaction are offered in roughly equal proportions, along with lots of



You didn't actually get to sail to this island: instead there was a 'storytelling interlude'.

exploring and a large amount of freedom. There are normally at least three options open to you, and just keeping track of everything that's going on can be a challenge in itself. This bias towards story over mechanics helps to create a strong atmosphere, where you actually find yourself caring about the consequences of your actions, and worrying about your decisions.

This atmosphere is greatly aided by the fact that, as the game progresses, you too begin to transform into a bizarre mixture of human and praying mantis. Although this gives you very definite advantages in game terms – making you stronger, tougher and more effective in combat – such is the strength of the story that you find yourself racing around, desperately trying to finish the game before it's 'too late'.

Of course, *Entomorph* still suffers from the same problems as all computer 'roleplaying' games, in the sense that there's precious little roleplaying involved, and interaction with other characters is limited to plot-related puzzles. An automap feature would also have been a time-saving godsend. Despite this, *Entomorph*'s a fun, engaging game that stresses puzzle-solving over endless combat, and the original (compared to most computer games, at least) story offers a lot more interest than yet another dungeon trek.

Andy Butcher

Score 7/10

you a real sense of satisfaction and achievement. It's not particularly deep, and neither is it going to change the face of computer roleplaying. But it is great fun, and makes a welcome change from dull dungeon bashes.

Andy Butcher **Score 7/10**

Codex – Imperial Guard

A supplement for Warhammer 40K
£9.99 Games Workshop
01773 713213 Out now

Codex – Imperial Guard is the long-awaited, definitive guide to the Imperial Guard army. It contains rules for weaponry, equipment and special forces; plus details of the structure, history and heroes of this military behemoth.

Traditionally, the Guard have served in the capacity of ego masseurs to other players. Any warlord in need of a morale-boosting victory had only to pick a fight with them, and they'd obligingly form up, lasguns winking, to execute their galaxy-renowned 'dying in droves' manoeuvre. Well, no more! The Guard have drafted in some serious ordnance and are now armed with the most fearsome firepower in the game.

To be truly worthwhile, a supplement of this nature must create a particular style for an army, establishing tactics for it that make it challenging to play. In this task the *Codex* succeeds admirably. The rules contained in this book enable the Guard to pulverise the enemy with the steamroller attacks of its massed infantry and tanks, ably supported by punishing barrages from its artillery.

Sections describing the structure and history of the army offer players plenty of inspiration to develop this strategy. Additionally, the book is chock full of lavish colour photos of the huge array of Guard miniatures available, painted in a diverse range of colour schemes that kickstart the imagination.

The rules contained in the *Codex* significantly develop the *Warhammer 40K* system, with a number of intriguing abilities and situations introduced. However, much of the material is familiar as Games Workshop has been baiting us with *White Dwarf* previews of it for the last twelve months. Inevitably, though, there's enough new ammo supplied to make this

book an essential purchase for any budding Guard Commander with delusions of grandeur.

Mark Donald **Score 8/10**

The Return Of Randall Morn

A scenario for AD&D

£4.50 TSR 01223 212517 Out now

This scenario sounds like it might be an income tax adventure. Actually, I wish it was: it might have been rather more fun.

A LARGE PRINT scenario, *Return* is suitable only for players of limited imagination and a fondness for spoon feeding. Its strictly linear plot drags players brutally between set-pieces, the outcome of which is usually entirely beyond their control. The characters they meet are sad, two-dimensional collections of statistics held together by names, while the unremittingly tedious world they can explore is peopled by such fearsome beasts as orcs and – gasp – humans!

Top bloke Randall Morn, it transpires, has been kidnapped. The party sets out to rescue him, wanders around the woods and gets beaten up a bit. Then they wander around a town and get beaten up a lot. A wagon crashes. The good guys beat up the bad guys. The end.

In scenarios like this one that rely on set-pieces, the referee and the designer should be working together to keep players on the straight and narrow. Designers should pull the players along the intended path with plotty tidbits, while the ref should be given the power to push them. More importantly, the scenario should be flexible so that it can be shaped to suit the party playing it. *The Return Of Randall Morn* offers no such scope, enforcing its will with edicts like "Regardless of how cautious the player characters are..." a device that directly discourages creative play.

The encounters the scenario enforces are unfortunately mundane too, with the party repeatedly facing large groups of humans and orc warriors. As a result the battles are usually drawn out slugging matches.

Return works as a scenario but not as an adventure: it's functional rather than fun, sort of painting by numbers without the creative bits.

Trenton Webb **Score 2/10**

STOCS lite

Quick-and-dirty roleplaying rules (and supplements)

£3.99 Wasteland Games 01265 824261 Out now

Minimalist rule systems can make roleplaying much easier: here's one that takes up just 32 pages and is cheap, too

With fewer rules to worry about, you have fewer breaks to check on the rules, and that means uninterrupted play – and continuous atmosphere. It's good, then, to see Northern Irish outfit Wasteland squeezing an entire rules system, sans background, into a readable 36-page booklet.

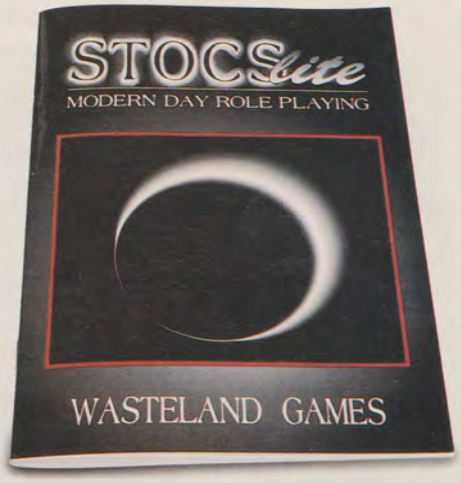
Sub-titled 'Modern Day Role Playing', this quick-and-dirty rules system offers a framework to which any late-20th-Century setting can be bolted. If you want to devise a realistic gangster-based game, or police-based campaign, then these rules lend themselves perfectly.

There are sections covering the usual RPG fare – character creation, skills system, combat issues, wounds, recovery and the like – all of which have been very well thought out, with ease of use always paramount. A skills check, for example, is quickly resolved by the roll of a d20.

In play the system works well, providing a logical means of making decisions without infringing on the gameplay. So, thumbs up so far...

To accompany the system Wasteland have released a source book entitled *Maji: They Are Already Here*, in which the world is being taken over by The Greys, an alien race which accidentally crashed one of their craft at Roswell in the '40s. Player characters stumble across this information, or hints of it, and are thus drawn into this world of ugly lies, alien machinations and the odd mutilated calf. This 'alternate reality' campaign backdrop works well, though it's a little hard to imagine enough scenarios coming out of this setting before they all get too samey.

Also available is a four-scenario booklet, *Killing Ground*. These scenarios don't fit into the *Maji* campaign setting and are, quite frankly, pretty dreadful. You'd have to do some serious work to make them fit together – the locations, demands on player characters and preferable PC occupations vary greatly.



Finally there is a game-based-upon-a-game. *Point Blank: Redemption Through Violence* is an 'action movie' RPG which uses most of the *STOCS lite* rules system but goes to the effort to provide a campaign setting within its 36 pages. It's a world made up entirely of Bruce Willises, Arnies, and Charlie Chans which, though completely over-the-top in spirit, falls somehow flat (especially when compared to the rich world of *Feng Shui*).

My advice is buy the *STOCS lite* rules and devise your own campaign setting.

Paul Pettengale

STOCS lite **Score 7/10**

36 pages, £3.99. Simplistic but cheap and effective.

Maji **Score 5/10**

44 pages, £5.99. More limiting than it may sound.

Killing Ground **Score 3/10**

34 pages, £4.99 Lack of imagination lets it down.

Point Blank **Score 4/10**

36 pages, £4.99. Appealing, but lacks flavour.

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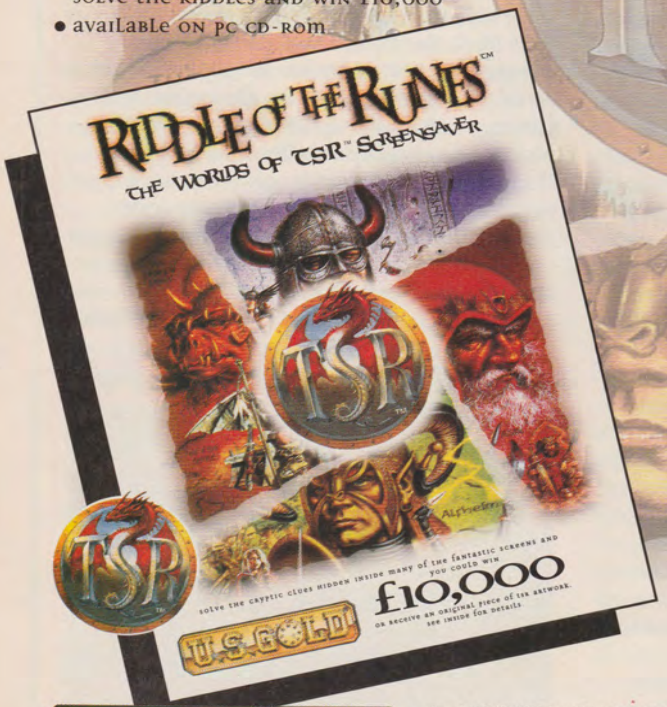
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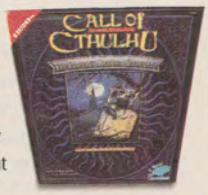
The Compact Arkham Unveiled

A supplement for Call of Cthulhu
£12.95 Chaosium
001 510 547 7681 Out now



Arkham has been unveiled once before. Five years ago Chaosium published their highly acclaimed supplement detailing this most sinister of fictional towns and now they feel the time has come to update it. So why should we tell you about something that has just been re-released? Well, partly because they've made some small changes, but mostly because it's great.

First the changes, *Compact Arkham Unveiled* is smaller than the original. The scenarios have been taken out, which seems like a shame at first but does mean that you get to spend your money a little more cannily. The other change in this second edition is less noticeable. The editing has been tightened up a little and the layout improved.

So changes aside, what do you get for your money? Well Arkham (as any fule kno) is the home of the Miskatonic University and a centre of Cthuloid activity – this book provides a gazeteer to the town as it was in the '20s. With over 1000 locations described, complete with many NPCs plus some background material and an excellent pull-out map and newspaper (The Arkham Advertiser), this is certainly a comprehensive overview. All the material is well thought out, with loads of ideas for adventures pouring out of every page.

The book contains everything you'll ever need to know to run a campaign from Arkham. But therein lies a concealed warning to the potential purchaser. There's so much material here that a referee will have to spend quite some time absorbing it all before running it smoothly.

If you're just starting up a campaign and you want to centre it around Arkham or have Arkham feature very prominently then this book will reward you hugely for any effort you put into it. If, on the other hand, you already have a campaign running and just fancy some more information on Arkham in case your players ever go there, then you'll find this book, especially now that the scenarios have been removed, will be much too heavy going for you to be able to get a quick reward.

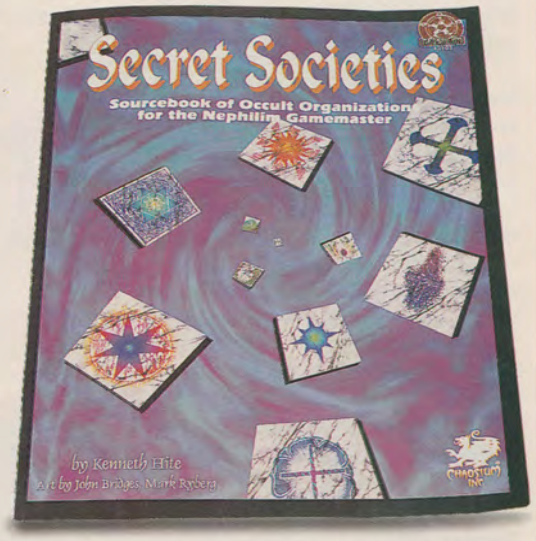
Steve Faragher **Score 9/10**

Secret Societies

A sourcebook of occult organisations for the Nephilim Referee

£16.95 Chaosium Inc 001 510 547 7681 Out now

They live in the twilight realm between reality and paranoia: now you too can learn about the hidden masters of the world


Secret Societies
Sourcebook of Occult Organization for the Nephilim Gamemaster
by Kenneth Hite
Art by John Bridges, Mark Rycker
Chaosium Inc

The Nephilim are the secret force behind human history. In fact, the human race was only created because the Nephilim – being elemental spirits – need a supply of host bodies to live in. Many important historical figures were in fact Nephilim, and most important historical events were part of the Nephilim's quest for 'Agartha', or spiritual transcendence.

This supplement concentrates on the secret societies which oppose the Nephilim in their quest. It isolates the four main elements that most secret societies draw on (Hermeticism, Gnosticism, Rosicrucianism and Freemasonry), it gives detailed accounts of some of the most important groups, and it introduces us to some new organisations who were not in the basic rulebook. Along the way, we learn some new spells and get some floorplans of things like the secret Rosicrucian library in Oxford, and the secret Nazi refuge in Antarctica.

It is brilliantly done: witty, frighteningly well-researched, and a lot livelier than the bare listing of secret groups in the original rulebook. The author, Kenneth Hite, has the true conspiracy theorist's gift for making unlikely links between legend, myth and fiction seem convincing. So when he tells us that the search by Elizabethan explorers for routes to India was "a metaphor for enlightenment", or that the Nazi Thule may have used Atlantean flying saucers to establish a base on the dark side of the moon, we almost find ourselves believing him.

It's all fantastically well researched, but just how useful would it be in the game itself?

On the other hand, the level of detail in the book may cause problems. The section on 'gnosticism' – a form of Christianity which says that secret knowledge is more important than faith – remarks that it influenced the Joachimite Christians of 14th century Italy. Hands up all those who know what Joachimite Christians were? And whether they are real or just a part of the *Nephilim* background? You could go and look it up in the library, but that rather defeats the object of buying a supplement.

Worse, there are practically no suggestions of how to use all this stuff in an actual game. OK, so Himmler used the SS to support the Teutonic Knights and John Dee wanted to turn the court of Queen Elizabeth into a new Camelot. So what? How does any of this impact on my PCs? How can I turn it into a scenario?

I get the feeling that this book is aimed at people who are interested in the world of *Nephilim* for its own sake, irrespective of whether they are actually going to play it. If you're one of them, then you'll probably find it indispensable.

Andrew Rilstone

Score 5/10

Frenzy

£9.99 Venture Press 01236 781720 Out now

A complete roleplaying system for recreating action movies is a great idea, but can frenzy compete with the best?

Inspired by the action thrillers of Hong Kong director John Woo, *Frenzy* ambitiously tries to recreate the mayhem of the Big Loud Action Movie (or BLAM), as critic Joe Queenan dubs it. Players can mimic the action of hard-boiled thrillers such as *The Killer, Die Hard* and *Aliens*.

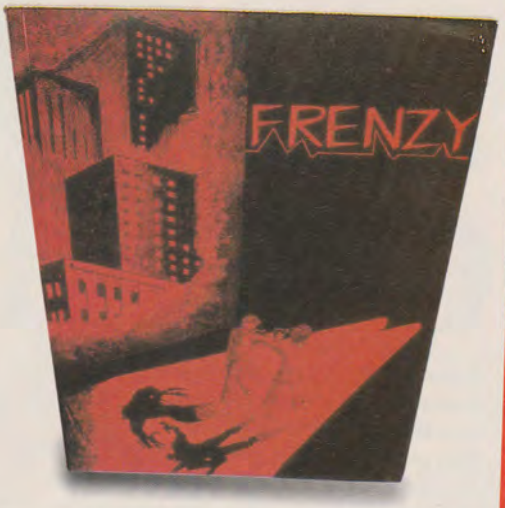
Independently published by Cumbernauld's Venture Press, *Frenzy* comes in a 136-page perfect-bound book with a lurid red/black cover. Appropriately for an action game, the rules are simple, taking up just seven pages.

Characters are created with six genre-related attributes which are used to resolve nearly all a character's combat actions. Both combat and damage resolution are neatly handled on a single percentage roll, while a pretty austere sub-system deals with skills.

Two sample campaigns are provided. One, 'Crime Story', is set in a generic rain-swept neonopolis filled with street gangs, Chinese Triads, assassins and the like. The other, 'The Stone Killers', takes place in a sub-*Warhammer 40K* universe, where bounty hunters hunt space pirates, monsters and other beastliness.

Though **arcane** would wish to encourage small press publishers like Venture, it's hard to be generous about *Frenzy*. To be frank, the game is slight, underdeveloped and uncharismatic.

Despite the back cover blurb, there's hardly any John Woo in the game, and very little of the BLAM genre for that matter. At almost no point do the authors examine the genre's conventions or give concrete hints on how to recreate the feel or atmosphere of the source material. References are limited to a slim biography of films and comics, and no attempt is made to differentiate between, say, the Hong Kong action style, big Hollywood action, or the noir pastiche of the Tarenteenies.

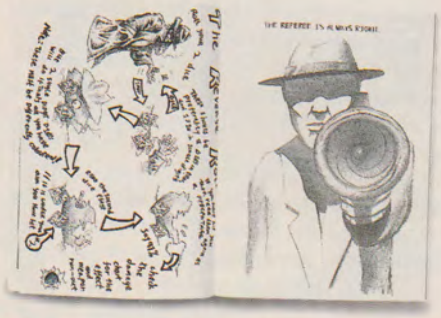


The campaign notes are skeletal at best and lack wit. No scenarios are provided – just a half-dozen plot ideas are sketched out. A ref would have to work hard to kick these campaigns into shape.

A few pages of system and reams of undeveloped campaign material do not a game make. The authors take the genre seriously and have the germ of a good idea, but have been unable to translate it onto the page. They should hire a good editor and go back to the drawing board.

Lee Brimmicombe-Wood

Score 4/10



Is that an enormous hand cannon, or I have I just been clocked doing ninety in a thirty zone?

Super Nova

A collectable card game
18 card booster packs £1.99
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In the UK call Gamecraft
0151 207 3737 Out now

Super Nova is something of a refreshing change from the flood of collectable card games that's still deluging the market. Available only in booster packs, each of which contains a rules leaflet, *Super Nova* is intended as a quick, fun science fiction game for just about any number of players.

What makes it almost unique is that everyone uses the same deck of cards to play – so there's no need for lengthy deck-building, and you don't need to spend a fortune to play the game. There isn't even a limit on how many cards should be in a deck, although the rules recommend at least 25 per player.

The game itself is basically about empire-building – the aim is to control planets, each of which has a Population Potential (which limits the number of Population cards that can be played on it). The first player to have a certain total Population Potential under their control wins the game. Play is fast, mainly as everyone performs the various phases of a turn at the same time, and the whole game is quick and simple to pick up. The only problem is that the rules don't actually tell you what Population Potential you need to win! Still, we found that anything between 10 and 30 made for a fun game...

Andy Butcher **Score 6/10**

The Evil Eye

A scenario for AD&D Ravenloft
£5.99 TSR Out now

Not so much a dungeon bash as an opportunity for strong roleplaying and character interaction, *The Evil Eye* is a scenario for three to six PCs of levels 4-6 that serves as the perfect introduction to the Ravenloft campaign world.

It's divided up into six separate episodes, not necessarily to be played linearly, that all boast a wealth of imaginative and atmospheric detail as well as numerous hooks for developing adventures at tangents to the one described. The first episode can be set pretty much anywhere in pretty much any

campaign, and serves as a door into the depraved, twisted world of Ravenloft and an introduction to the mysterious Vistani.

Once there, the players soon meet up with the principal characters, all of them pursuing their own hidden agendas with cruel vigour. The central plot – though there are several sub-plots involving things like tragic love and serial killing to keep things interesting – concerns Gabrielle Aderre, lord of Invidia, who, despite betraying her mother and being cursed with her own child's future betrayal for her trouble, has gone and given birth to a fine young son, Molocchio. Molocchio has a variety of supernatural powers (anyone who's normal in Invidia is abnormal), chief of which is his ability to destroy the entire campaign world when he reaches maturity. The Vistani want to stop him, and they want the players to help.

The Evil Eye is a splendid scenario, bursting with fascinating characters and plotlines – highly recommended.

Cliff Ramshaw Score 8/10

Magic: The Gathering Fourth Edition

The Pocket Players' Guide
£5.99 Wizards Of The Coast
0345 125599 Out now

It's been a long time coming, but the latest edition of *The Pocket Player's Guide* is finally here. Since the release of the original version, several important (if subtle) changes have been made to the rules and the Fourth Edition of the basic set has arrived. This new edition, then covers much of the same ground as before, but is completely up to date and has some extra stuff besides.

As before, the bulk of the book is made up of an expanded discussion of the rules of the game, including many examples and comments. This is followed by a glossary, then sections on developing your deck, multiplayer games, the Duelists' Convocation and tournament rules, and finally a complete guide to all the cards in Fourth Edition (with the full text for every card) and notes on any previous cards that now behave differently under the revised version of the rules.

To be honest, this is something of a must-have for anyone who more than dabbles in *Magic*. The rules section alone is worth the asking price, serving to both settle any disputes in play and clarify the recent changes. For the price of a →

Homelands

An expansion set for Magic: The Gathering

8 card booster pack £1.40 Wizards Of The Coast
0345 125599 Out now

The seemingly unstoppable *Magic: The Gathering* continues to grow apace...

As with all expansion sets for *Magic: The Gathering, Homelands* has a theme. The idea this time is that a whole world, once a commonly travelled part of Dominia, was sealed off by a powerful wizard to protect it from other Planeswalkers. Now, hundreds of years later, the powerful mage has died and the enchantment has been broken, opening the world to Planeswalkers (and thus to players of *Magic*).

What makes *Homelands* stand out, though is the amount of thought and detail that has obviously gone into the background, and how it effects the cards in the set. Continuing the trend set by *Fallen Empires*, each colour has a certain race or groups of races associated with it. Unlike *Fallen Empires*, though, these races tie in with those found in the basic set. So, for example, red has a range of Minotaurs, green has a load of new Fairies, and black players will be pleased to discover the complete Sengir family, which makes a vampire deck feasible for the first time. Likewise, many of the spells have their roots in common cards from the basic set.

Homelands is perhaps the most balanced and well designed *Magic* expansion so far. You can't escape the feeling that if Richard Garfield had his wish, and got to completely redesign the game from the ground up (see 'The Man Who Killed Roleplaying?' on page 25), this is the kind of card set he'd end up with.

There's a good range of spells on offer, from simple creatures to horrifically powerful artifacts (the Apocalypse Chime for example, destroys *all* Homelands cards in play), and the coherent feel created by having a number of 'races' should spark off a dozen ideas for 'theme' decks just by flicking through a few cards. More importantly, though, there are no stupidly cheap casting costs. Wizards Of The Coast have been putting a lot of work into balancing *Magic*, and this set is no exception. Although there are some very nasty cards indeed, you have to pay to get them out.

As well as encouraging sensible deck design, this also helps to prevent the problem of 'Mr Suitcase', who fills his decks with every rare, cheap-to-cast nightmare in the game, making him virtually unbeatable by players with a smaller collection of cards. With *Homelands*, he'll still have more copies of the rare cards, but their realistic costs means that he's not going to be able to fill a deck with them.

So, players who want cheap 'killer cards' are going to be disappointed. Those who genuinely enjoy the game, though, will find *Homelands* a valuable addition to their card collection.

Andy Butcher

Score 8/10

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starter deck, you can't really afford to be without this book, and it serves as a very good example of what a CCG players' guide should be.

Andy Butcher Score 9/10

Spawn

A board game £19.50 (import)
Pressman Toy Corporation
001 908 545 4000 Out now

Based on the popular Todd McFarlane comic book character Spawn, this game is, unfortunately, utterly crap. A massive, colourful box opens to reveal six okayish plastic figures, a colourful but rubbish-looking board, a combination *Spawn* comic and rule book, a deck of miniscule, poorly printed cards, a selection of punch-out counters and six blank dice with a sheet of plastic stickers that need to be stuck on before play can commence.

And what play it is. Four people must each move their plastic character nine squares from the start to the victory. That's it. Each square represents a panel from a comic book story, the 'concept' being that you are progressing through a story each time you play. The cards are of two types, either pages from comic books that are played on to the blank panels or alarmingly simple 'specials'. Take it in turns to play a card, roll the dice and move around the board. And eventually someone will win by pure luck. And it'll be a great relief to pack the game away and never see it again.

The gameplay is practically non-existent, the player who starts is given a clear advantage and there are barely any tactics that can be used to influence the play once you're away. I cannot think of a game that I have ever played that has been this poor in execution. And what's most incredible about it is that there's a set of speed rules to be played 'with your younger brother or sister'. These simplify the most calamitously simple game it has ever been my displeasure to review. Oh calumny. It only gets one point because I quite like the plastic figure of the Violator, Spawn's arch-enemy which is even now perched menacingly on the top of my monitor. But that doesn't really justify the ludicrous price tag.

Steve Faragher Score 1/10

Country Sites

A sourcebook for AD&D

£7.99 TSR 01223 212517 Out now

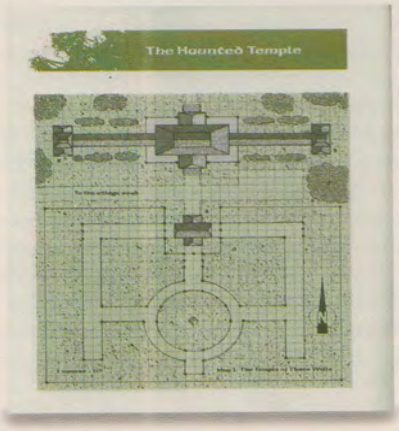
anybody can be good in the country, according to oscar wilde.

Ever staged an epic quest only to lose inspiration after the umpteenth encounter and bar-room brawl? Those helpful little people at TSR think that quite a few Referees are suffering that very problem, and so with kindness in their hearts, release *Country Sites*, the concluding volume of their *Site* series of accessories. *Country Sites* boasts seven large and four lesser settings, the larger sites range from a haunted oriental temple to an elven asylum and an arabic tent city, the smaller are just floorplans and background sites, such as a toll-house and a waystation.

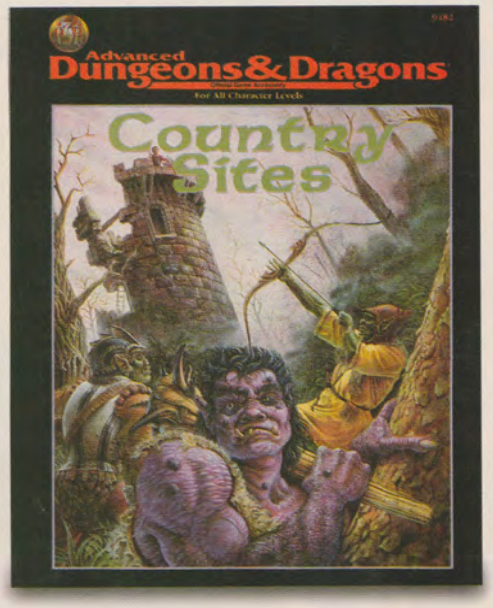
When reading this book, one thing must be kept in mind; these are frameworks for adventures. Taken as they are, the majority of the sites will prove to have many failings – lack of any reward for a PC's efforts being a major weakness. My advice for any ref is to ignore the adventure hooks, as they are very poor.

The settings can, however, be salvaged with a little thought. Prime examples are the interesting sites of The Haunted Temple and The Place of Broken Dreams. Interesting, but with little hope for exciting roleplaying unless set as a divine test of faith or as a condition for level advancement (two ideas the author really should have come up with). And the ref will still have to convince the other characters to accompany the suddenly morally compelled PC.

Country Sites does succeed in the sites of The City of the Dead, where tomb robbing PCs find new



The haunted temple. This was honestly the most inspiring bit of artwork we could find in the book...



surprises, The Mariner's Graveyard, The Island of Lost Souls and, to a certain extent, Darion's Wall, though avid readers of David Gemmel will surely have staged such an adventure.

All four offer a certain amount of originality and offer exciting scenarios for roleplaying, whether as part of an existing campaign or even as stand-alone adventures, especially if past crimes catch up with the PCs and they find themselves in the gaol on Gedding's Island.

If you are looking for a volume of amazing adventures – fully mapped, laid out and ready to use – then look elsewhere. If, on the other hand, you are looking for adventure ideas, then search no longer.

Country Sites does have failings, however, and a certain amount of reworking is needed. Monster descriptions are sadly absent, for example.

In the end, *Country Sites*, as with other volumes in the series, is a useful accessory, but by no means an essential one.

David Cornford

Score 6/10

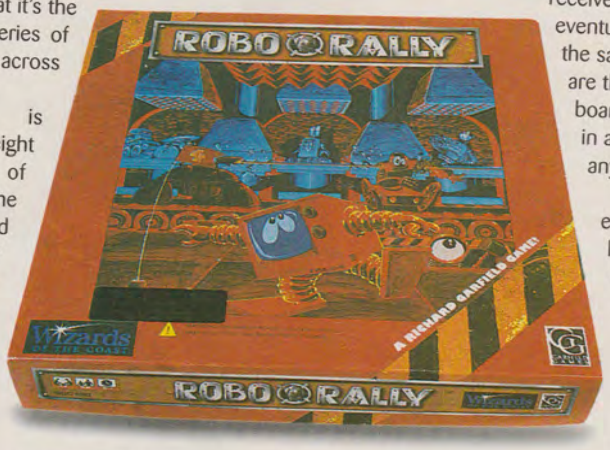
RoboRally 2nd Edition

A board game

£29.99 Wizards Of The Coast 0345 125599 Out now

Richard Garfield's robot racing game returns in a new edition. Being a computer has probably never been so much fun...

RoboRally is a board game set in an automated factory of the near future. The various artificial intelligences controlling the factory have got a bit bored with the daily grind, and so have decided to liven things up by having a race. Each AI picks their favourite robot, and attempts to program its movements so that it's the first to reach a series of checkpoints set across the factory.



RoboRally is played by two to eight players, each of whom takes on the role of an AI and controls a 'cute' robot in the race across a factory floor made from up to six modular boards.

Each turn all the players are dealt nine program cards, which have instructions such as 'turn left' or 'move forward two spaces'. You choose five of these cards to use, and the order in which they will be played. Then, one card at a time, everyone makes their moves simultaneously. Sounds simple, right?

Well, it would be, apart from the fact that the factory is littered with obstacles, ranging from simple walls to conveyer belts, pits and crushers. Oh, and each robot has a front-mounted laser. When only two or three people are playing, it's not to hard to avoid each other. With four or more, on the other hand, things can get very complicated very quickly, as robots are shot to bits and pushed out of position, normally ruining your plans.

RoboRally is one of those rare gems – a game with an incredibly simple set of rules that's also incredibly addictive and great fun. There's a lot of skill involved in both choosing the right program cards to get you where you want to go and at the same time trying to predict what the other players will do – as everyone reveals their moves simultaneously, you never know what's going to happen. Luckily the damage rules are just as easy to get to grips with as the basics (damaged robots receive fewer cards each turn, eventually being forced to use the same cards every time), as are the effects of the various board elements, which all act in a specific order, avoiding any potential confusion.

This, the second edition of *RoboRally*, is largely unchanged from the first. Cosmetically, the boards are brighter than before, and the robot miniatures are one-piece, which is a lot more convenient. More significantly, though, the rules have been re-written to make them clearer, and contain more details on setting up the game (with up to six boards and up to six checkpoints, the possibilities are virtually limitless).

So, although there's little point in buying it if you've already got the original, anyone who's looking for great way to while away a couple of hours and have fun is strongly advised to check this out – it's simple to learn, extremely replayable, and most importantly, a great game – although you do need at least four players to get the most out of it.

Don't, however, attempt to play *RoboRally* when under the influence of any mind-altering chemicals – after a few pints of lager and a curry, even the simplest race will melt your brain.

Andy Butcher

Score 7/10

Masterpiece Collection

A collection of roleplaying games for the PC Mindscape/SS
01444 246333 £44.99
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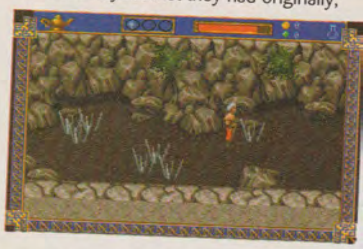
It has to be said that six complete PC roleplaying games in one rather impressive box is certainly good value f money. Included here are some of the most recent of SSI's official AD&D licen (deep breath) – *Dark Sun: Shattered Lands, Dark Sun: Wake Of The Ravager, Ravenloft: Strahd's Possession, Ravenlo Stone Prophet, Al-Qadim: The Genie's Curse* and, lastly, *Forgotten Realms: Menzoberranzan.*

The games are all contained on four CD-ROMs, each of which also contains th relevant manuals in Adobe Acrobat format (an Acrobat viewer is also included), which means you can print them out with exactly the same layout that they had originally,



while SSI save on the cost of including six relatively hefty booklets. Of course, if you haven't got access to a printer this isn't going to be very useful, but most of the games are fairly simple to get to grips with, provided you have at least a passing familiarity with the *AD&D* rules.

Another downside is that only three of the games are actually any good – *Wake Of The Ravager* (an overhead viewed trek across the deserts of Dark Sun), *Stone Prophet* (first person perspective an Egyptian feel) and *The Genie's Curse* (an almost arcadey graphic adventure). The rest struggle to attain varying degrees of averageness. It has to be said, though, that even three decent (if not quite inspired) computer games for the price of one is still a great bargain – there's enough gameplay in this set to keep you going for several months at least.

Andy Butcher Score 6/10

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Hot Metal

arcane's guide to fantasy miniatures returns, with Karen Newis picking out the best new figures

Hog Cycle & Rider

Grenadier's 'Future Warriors' range goes on, despite artist Mark Copplestone's defection to another place. *Hog Cycle & Rider* (1539, 36mm high) is sadly a case of 'great bod, shame about the bike'. Smashing concept, rotten execution – one suspects that bits of Copplestone's work have been cobbled on to an amateur's reject. Still, once you fight the assembly challenge and paint it up, it might do the job for a *Shadowrun* type game. The casting is good work – shame to waste it on such a mediocre figure.

Grenadier Models 01244 536111 around £2.95

She-Cat

From Grim Reaper, *She-Cat* (1044, 36mm in length) is from the 'Nasteez' range. Despite the roughness of the sculpting and the hyperbolic representation of the female form, this is an interesting (if in some ways repulsive) piece. It saddens me that despite the fairly huge advances this industry has made, we are still getting this kind of blatant wet dream material in the figures arena. Sadly, what company could ever resist a fast buck? And the figure is, at least, well cast.

Grim Reaper Miniatures, Philadelphia USA
001 212 626 8031 SRP £1.25

Dragon Kin Elf with Spear

Despite the fact that designer Chaz Elliott has not touched putty in some time, the wheels of this industry grind so slowly that we still see new stuff from him. *Dragon Kin Elf with Spear* (5044, 40mm high) is not his best, but it still shows the flair and attention to detail you would expect from Chaz. The dragon on the helm is more believable than many of the large scale wyrms we see. Clean casting of sharp detail should make painting a breeze, but treat it gently – Heartbreaker use really soft metal.

Heartbreaker, Philadelphia USA
001 610 544 9052 SRP £0.95

Undead

Ah yes: skeleton-type things. Everybody does them, but some do them well, some do them not so well – and some do them very well. Certainly I like this one from, appropriately, Reaper (02014, 48mm high). It's not the most anatomically correct figure you've ever seen, for sure, but it has a delightful cartoon quality to it, it needs very little work before painting, and it even has a halfway interesting shield. R Pugh brings us a good, solid, dependable skellie that is not only chunky enough to survive a couple of kicks round the room, but also cheap!

Reaper Miniatures, Texas USA
001 214 434 3088 around £1.99

4th Infantry Command (for Flintloque)

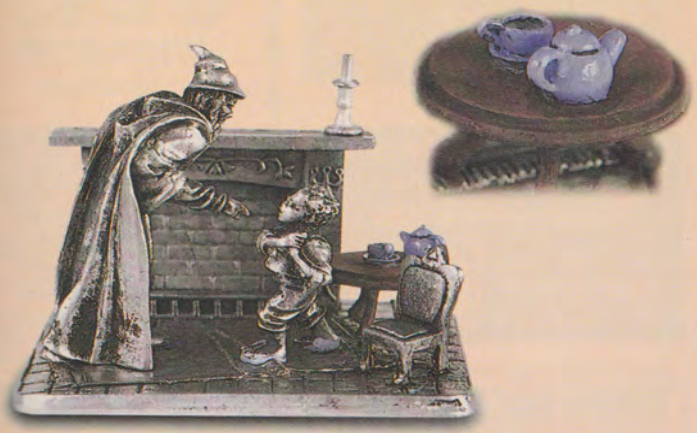
The Figure Company once more stretch the bounds of credibility, this time by giving us the *4th Infantry Command* (32841, 32mm high). If The FC are to be believed, dwarves just got taller – about even with humans, in fact. Still, these are well sculpted and interestingly designed. It is unlikely that many people will find uses for them outside *Flintloque*, since the figures are such parodies, but these are good miniatures nonetheless.

Alternative Armies 01159 287809 around £3.95 for four

Bilbo Surrenders the One Ring

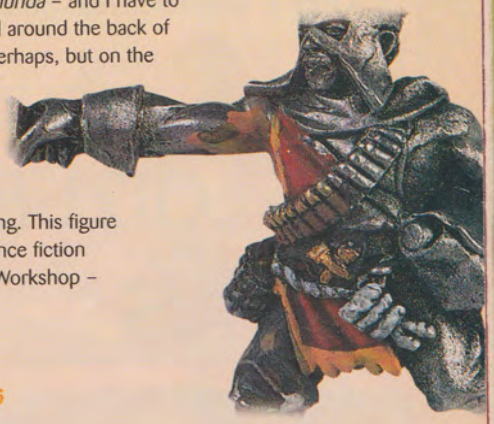
I like a company that sticks to what it does best. Mithril continue to delight us with Tolkein stuff, and *Bilbo Surrenders the One Ring* (MV362, 35mm high, 44mm wide) is no exception. Not pre-undercoated, but it hardly matters when you get such a dinky teapot. Old hands will enjoy the jigsaw puzzle that falls out of the blister pack, but novices might find it daunting... though fear not, there is a picture to help you. In the packaging, the picture hides the metal: but believe me, the sculpting and casting are well up to standard. Yup, it's worth the graft – and the cash.

Mithril Miniatures, Ireland *00353-26-40222*
SRP £5.99 the set



House Cawdor: Leader (for Necromunda)

Wait a second, what's going on here? I have in my hands a Games Workshop figure for their new game, *Necromunda* – and I have to say that I like it. Some of the detail around the back of the figure might be a bit sloppy, perhaps, but on the other hand (almost literally) Alan Perry has done great things with the front view. The figure (30mm high, 60mm in length) is still too pricey by my reckoning, but hey – you can't have everything. This figure could actually be used in any science fiction game, but don't let on to Games Workshop – that can be our secret!



Games Workshop
01773 713213 £2.75

Ratmen Bazooka and Mortar Crew

Hey, these are good. Much more of this and I'll be forced to retract previous accusations of sloppiness. From the 'Fantasy Army Pack' range, *Ratmen Bazooka* (3211, average ratman 29mm high) comprises 3 ratmen and a cannon thingy. Okay, so facially they resemble foxes more than rats, but I can forgive that. The anatomy is credible, the detail is... well, see for yourself. Very clean moulding, no parting lines visible. I like them, what more can I say? Buy them.

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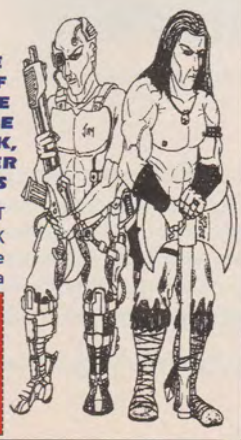

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The Great Library

In which all the latest books are read and reviewed by our panel of literary geniuses (ahem), so that you can find out what's worth spending your money on...

Sixty Years of the World's Favourite Comic Book Heroes

by Les Daniels Published by DC Comics
Hardback £30 Out now

This is a fabulous book. Two hundred and fifty large-format pages crammed with great information and even better re-printed panels from 60 years of DC comics. DC's growth is a rich and fascinating story, and the author does it justice.

The book is split into chronologically presented two-page features, each dealing with a separate theme; such as the birth of Superman, the Bob Hope comics (no, really), the unexpected success of Swamp Thing, the politics of '69, Wonder Woman on TV and the reinvention of Batman (four or five times). This is as much a history of the second half of the Twentieth Century as it is of a comic book company.

> "Even criminals get old! Those who don't end up in prison, the gutter... or the grave!"

Every so often, to break up the pace, there's a great picture-spread of merchandise; and these are surprisingly interesting. The '40s Superman krypto-raygun, the Corgi Batmobile of the '70s and 1981 Superman peanut butter all look superb. I may start collecting myself.

So if you wanted to know that Bob Kane based Batman on a combination of Leonardo da Vinci's sketches, Zorro and Bela Lugosi, or that the quote "Who watches the watchmen?" is from the ancient Roman poet Juvenal, or even that Jack Nicholson was Bob Kane's suggestion to play the joker several years before the film was made, then this is definitely the book for you.

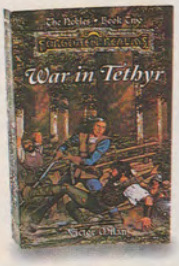
In fact, if it weren't for the price, this'd be getting a maximum.

Steve Faragher

Score 9/10

California Gothic

by Dennis Etchison Published by Robinson Publishing
Paperback £4.99 Out now



It would be very easy to pick up Dennis Etchison's latest tale and, glancing at the cover, surmise that it's a vampire novel. In fact, there's not one bloodsucker to be found. Instead you get a rather interesting and more than slightly strange tale of a seemingly normal American bloke, Dan, and a young woman, Jude, who's apparently come back from the dead to make his life hell.

Rather than doing this in the time-honoured *Friday The 13th* fashion of bursting in and slashing him to death with any sharp instruments to be found nearby, though, Jude is set on a far more subtle course. *California Gothic* is one of those horror stories that uses atmosphere very effectively, building up a vague sense of

> "She turned to leave, smiling as if she had a secret, something too new and too personal, too private to share with anyone, least of all a stranger, just yet."

unease rather than just shocking you with gore. In doing so it breaks away from many of the weary traditions of the genre, all of which prevents it from becoming just another horror novel.

There's plenty here that a devious referee could use, but you'd have to be very skilled indeed (and have very good players) to get it to work effectively. As a source of ideas for gaming then, it's perhaps a bit sophisticated. As a book, it's very interesting indeed.

Andy Butcher Score 7/10

All Shadows Fled

by Ed Greenwood Published by TSR Paperback £4.99 Out now

It's good against evil again in this, the third book in the *Shadow of the Avatar* trilogy, and good is kicking uphill. The malevolent Malaugrym would bring downfall to Shadowdale before the Time of Troubles is passed. Meanwhile, those of the valley see this as their opportunity to rid their lands of evil, forever.

Both parties employ the tactic of infiltrating the house of their opponents with magic users, and the narrative switches pleasingly between the two viewpoints. Those who have followed the story so far will not want me to spoil

it for them by telling who wins. Suffice to say that three heroes and a ghost, under the guidance of their archmage, and armed with a bagful of spells, a magical sword each and an abundance of scything wit, go from Shadowdale up

"Wizards are all like that, inside," he told the swordcaptain softly. "If their control is ever broken, all the screaming and wide-eyed raving bursts out, for us all to see."

to Shadowhome to effect the destruction of the Evil Empire, and have a marvellous time about it, too.

There are a few boring fireballs, some of which may be shapeshifters, but the author's imagination produces spell after wacky spell. Readers will recognise many of them; some will be new.

So just as a source of spells, this book is worth the money. It's also reasonably well-written and abounds with gags and sarcastic backchat.

Jonathan Palmer **Score 7/10**

Wild C.A.T.S Covert Action Teams

by Brandon Choi & Jim Lee Published by Titan Books
Graphic Novel £7.99 Out now

Collecting up the stories from the first four issues, this edition introduces the original team members and tells the story of their first battle with the nasty Daemonite Cabal.

It's all fairly straight superhero fare, and the influence of Jim Lee's work on the X-Men is obvious. There are a number of different groups and organisations involved, the heroes all have their own little idiosyncrasies, and you can't help but look at some of the characters and draw comparisons with existing heroes. Warblade, for example, bears more than a passing similarity to Wolverine – just look at his pose on the cover of the book.

However, of all the artists who've tried to write, Lee is one of the more successful. Despite some confusing flashbacks at the start, he is at least capable

"Marlowe! But I saw you die thirty years ago! No Matter. I shall simply kill you again."

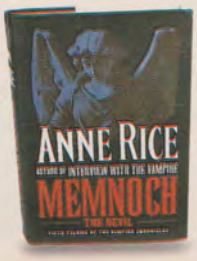
of stringing a story together. As long as you concentrate (a lot of characters and factions are introduced very quickly), it's an enjoyable if fairly linear tale. And of course, the art is simply stunning.

For people interested in the *WildStorms* card game (see page 67) but not familiar with the comics, this is a good introduction to many of the teams featured in the game. But not until Alan Moore took over the writing later on did the story really start to fulfil its potential – recent issues are far better than this.

Andy Butcher **Score 6/10**

Memnoch: The Devil

by Anne Rice Published by Chatto & Windus
Hardback £15.99 Out now



Understandably, since I'm an avid fan of Anne Rice (particularly the first book of her *Vampire* series, *Interview with the Vampire*) I was looking forward to her return to the subject of Lestat, the vampire.

He's done just about everything supernaturally possible except for meeting the Devil, so it was clearly time for the author to set up exactly that meeting. And so the scene is set for his greatest adventure yet...

Lestat falls victim to an unknown stalker. Terrified and desperate, he is eventually forced to confront this powerful presence, and finds himself in conversation with a dark angel who claims to be the devil. Incredibly, this seductive being offers Lestat the job of an eternal lifetime – helping the devil by being his right-hand man. He explains to Lestat that he is currently winning the war against God, but is finding this particular century tiresome. In an attempt to

"Love you, love you, love you, yes, and always... and no, you didn't know."

convince Lestat that he must help him, the devil offers to take our infamous hero to heaven and hell – a very tempting offer for the ever-curious vampire.

It's at this point that Anne Rice goes too far. Lestat is dragged through the history of the world, as is the reader. This journey through eternity is interesting and is a novel approach to an unoriginal idea, but unfortunately →

Dragons of Summer Flame

by Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman
Published by TSR Hardback £13.99 Out now

After a long break, the authors of the *Dragonlance* 'seasons' series of books have revisited the world of Krynn to bring us the fourth and last in the series (the previous three in the series are *Dragons of Autumn Twilight*, *Dragons of Winter Night* and *Dragons of Spring Dawning*).

Over twenty-five years has now passed for the original heroes of *Dragonlance*. This book, while introducing a host of new characters, also brings back some old favourites (and some less desirable returnees, too).

The fight against the armies of Darkness is still in progress and victory for the Dark Queen looks imminent. To save Ansalon from impending disaster, the youngest of Caramon and Tikka Majere's three boys – Palin Majere, a white robe of the lowest rank – must find his

"Yes, I could squash you as well, but not now. Not yet."

infamous Uncle Raistlin the Archmage. Corrupted by evil and lost in the Abyss (presumed dead), Raistlin must be found and rehabilitated.

Meanwhile, the mortals of Krynn battle against each other and rumours of all-out civil war abound. The Gods are in fear of their own destruction: they must all join forces to combat the most powerful force of all, Chaos. The Father of All and Nothing has returned.

The story is well-formed and entertaining, the pace is good and it holds your interest to the end. There are sufficient surprises – and, of course, the usual injection of humour from the unlikely hero Tasslehoff Burfoot. Those of you who enjoyed the first series won't be disappointed.

A new reader, however, really would have to read the previous books first to appreciate the characters and the dilemmas presented to them this time round. There are numerous references to previous events and long-dead comrades, which could prove frustrating and seem irrelevant. It's almost essential to know the history of Krynn to fully comprehend the significance of some of the more intricate plotlines.

Maryanne Booth

Score 8/10

Lestat's reaction to these events is annoying. He spends the story as an unlikely observer while Memnoch initiates him in the ways of God and the devil. Lestat's role throughout this is to blub at every available opportunity and follow the devil around like a frightened animal with his tail between his legs.

By the end of Memnoch's over-long diatribe, the most evil vampire ever to walk the earth is reduced to a snivelling, whimpering mess. The book concludes abruptly with an unnecessary cryptic message from Lestat leaving the reader confused and disappointed.

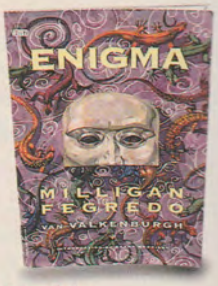
If this is the last of the *Vampire Chronicles*, it's a dismal conclusion to an inspiring series of books that won Anne Rice many admirers.

Maryanne Booth **Score 4/10**

Enigma

Writer - Peter Milligan Artist - Duncan Fegredo Published by Titan
Paperback £12.50 Out now

Michael Smith, ordinary bloke with an ordinary life. Suddenly this humdrum existence is shattered by a bizarre sequence of events; a series of villains and a heroic caped crusader that he used to read about as a child suddenly come crashing into his life.



What is his relationship with these comic-book characters? Why does he feel somehow at the centre of all this? He tracks down the author of his childhood comics and together they set out to find the truth.

This graphic novel features a deliberately bizarre mish-mash of styles and reminds me of avant-garde Italian literature that I was forced to read at university. It turns the genre on its head, attempts to explore the relationship between author and reader within the

"Oh, great. Charlie Manson is on my side. Things are really looking up."

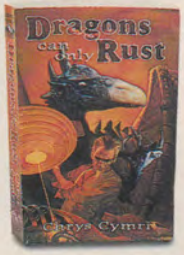
context of the story and challenges many of our preconceptions about the relationships we have with our heroes.

Luckily, and despite all that, it's a pretty good comic book too. The art is competent and the story (when not vanishing up its own existence) is gripping. There's not much material here for gaming, though.

Steve Faragher **Score 6/10**

Dragons Can Only Rust

by Chris Cymri Published by TSR Paperback
£4.99 Out now



Despite an odd title, this book promises much; an analysis of the nature of personhood and a spiritual journey in search of the self. But in fact it's just a disappointing mess of gobbledegook; the author repeats herself horribly and too much of the dialogue is written in clumsy futurespeak, making a weak plot virtually unintelligible.

If a dragon were created in the laboratory, with such well-developed artificial intelligence that it were self-aware, could think and speak, be the principal character in a novel, and recognise the shape of a dog in a cloud, would such a creature be alive? Would it have a soul? Would it have rights?

"I must know," Gonard demanded, panting as they reared yet again. "Who am I? What am I?"

This is interesting, but these questions are not properly addressed. Instead the narrative wanders aimlessly, intermittently complaining about inequality and totalitarian religion, occasionally crying out against loneliness and fickle friendships, while all the time claiming to be dealing with a subject it rarely refers to.

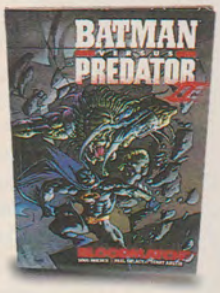
I waded through this literary quagmire in search of Gonard's soul and couldn't find it. Couldn't find anybody's soul. I rather thought Gonard had found as much soul as he was ever going to find simply by looking for it. This is what Itsa thinks, too, and this intuitive character expresses a valid point well, on several occasions. Maybe this reflects the view of the author. If so, then hats off, Zen on; but if it's so simple, why write about it?

Jonathan Palmer

Score 3/10

Bloodmatch: Batman versus Predator

Writer - Doug Moench Penciller - Paul Gulacy Inker - Terry Austin
Published by Titan Books Graphic Novel £4.99 Out now



Predator stories have an innate problem in that they're all essentially the same. The alien arrives, selects its target, kills a load of people, has the climactic battle with the hero and, of course, loses.

Nevertheless, the first *Batman Versus Predator* worked surprisingly well – mainly because of the novelty of seeing the alien in the familiar environment of Gotham – and the finely crafted story contrasted the two characters very effectively. Unfortunately, the sequel begins to show the strain. The straight 'nasty alien hunting bats' story has already been done, but, this being the Predator, repeating it is really the only option. In an attempt to liven things up, then, a range of extra plot devices are thrown into the mix. Unfortunately, most of these have also been done before – rogue Predators

"Just like... the last time. Decorations of blood and butchery..."

(in the *Dark Horse* comics), government agents who know about the alien (in *Predator 2* and the comics), a team-up between Batman and another hero (in too many comics to count), a bunch of highly skilled assassins also hunting the Batman (also in too many comics to count) and so on.

Despite the best efforts of the creative team behind the superb *Legends Of The Dark Knight* story *Prey, Bloodmatch* is just another collection of old ideas.

Andy Butcher **Score 5/10**

The Dragonesti

by Paul B Thompson and Tonya Cook Published by TSR
Paperback £4.99 Out now

This lightweight tale of adventure carries the reader along by the simple device of closing chapters with tantalising new developments in a direct plot. It's simple, formulaic stuff with a strong emphasis on dialogue over description, but it's a style which has rewarded the authors with half a million sales for their five *Dragonlance* novels to date, so they must be doing something right. This particular offering is the most recent book in the *Lost Histories* collection.

Three further titles by various different authors are due to be released next year.

A Qualinesti princess seeks to rescue her subjects as they flee the Iron Fist of Imperialist Tyranny. Her boat is engulfed in an evil mist and mysteriously stranded three hundred leagues from the Ergothian coast. In its attempt to regain land, the Evenstar is unexpectedly grounded – on the back of a kraken, if you please. (I said the plot lacks intricacy; I didn't say it was without its twists.)

As a piece of literature, this hardly deserves your time (not that it will take much), but as a source for referees seeking new inspiration, there are numerous creatures and concepts of interest,

"There's a legend I heard once," he murmured, "a long time ago, when I was a lad not yet gone to sea."

as well as the imaginatively described underwater Queendom of Urione, where the Dragonesti are plagued by attacks of giant flesh-eating crabs. Whatever next?

Jonathan Palmer **Score 6/10**

Worlds Without End

by Caroline Spector **Published by ROC Fantasy**
Paperback £4.99 **Out now**

Despite being a *Shadowrun* novel, *Worlds Without End* is the last part of a trilogy that begins in the world of *Earthdawn* – it's just that the two preceding novels haven't been released yet. It tells the tale of Aina, an immortal elf who seems to have had some trouble with a Horror, one of the evil astral creatures that can enter our world only when the level of magic is very high.

For some time she has been plagued by dreams foretelling the Horror's return, even though it's far too early in the cycle of magic for him to appear. Finally she enlists the aid of the likewise immortal (and elven) Harlequin, and sets off to warn the other elven powers. Following a trip around the world, she must finally face the object of her fears.

"...but before he could straighten, something caught my attention. Spinning about, I saw that the doors to the terrace had blown open. There, standing in the doorway was the Horror, Ysrthgrathe."

As the first real cross-over between *Earthdawn* and *Shadowrun*, *Worlds Without End* is something of a disappointment. It starts well and reveals some interesting details about the real powers in the world of *Shadowrun*, but the climax arrives all too soon, and is less than stunning. Part of the problem is that you're left with the distinct feeling that you've missed a lot of what's going on – perhaps once the two prequels have been released, it'll all make a bit more sense...

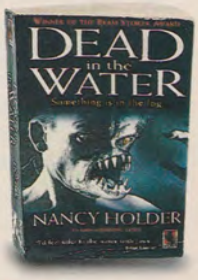
Andy Butcher **Score 5/10**

Dead in the Water

by Nancy Holder **Published by Robinson** **Paperback £4.99** **Out now**

When a cancer-ridden boy and his doctor father, already half-mad with worry, a bickering, wealthy couple, an old lady whose husband was lost at sea, and a tough female cop who once failed to save the life of a drowning boy – when a group like this boards a rickety old freighter and meets its tripped-out Vietnam vet cook who regularly talks to King Neptune, you know it's time to play the 'who's going to survive this one' game.

Each character has a secret, burning desire, and it's through this desire that something evil out there intends to draw them to a watery death, and worse...



The style varies between character-point-of-view fluency and sentences overladen with poetic effects. And short, broken sentences.

And paragraphs.

Jarring, and not particularly evocative. Things start slowly, not least because the only character drawn with any conviction is the lady cop – one significant item of

"This is how it will be when you drown."

personal history is about as much as the other characters get. Gradually, though, the plot and the fog thicken, and a brooding sense of nastiness evolves as our heroes desperately ignore the increasingly strange goings on around them.

With so few characters, though, and little for them to really do besides wait for something to happen, it seems like a long time before the corpses start appearing. And when we reach the climax, although it's original, it's sustained for a little bit too long, and told in a disjointed, 'is it real or is it imagined' sort of style that can wear one down.

It's quite an engaging read for all that; just don't expect too much of it.

Cliff Ramshaw **Score 6/10**

→

The Best New Horror

Edited by Stephen Jones **Published by Robinson**
Paperback £6.99 **Out now**

This annual volume of the cream of short horror stories has become a respected and much praised showcase for the genre; and this pick of 1994, selected by award-winning editor Stephen Jones, is an Aladdin's cave of treasures.

Some stories in particular throw up great possibilities for roleplaying. Of special interest will be the late Robert (Psycho) Bloch's neo-gothic vampire tale, Ian MacLeod's trippy and macabre

"You pick a girl yet? Take the one with the glass eye – she gives good socket."
from The Scent of Vinegar, by Robert Bloch

Lovecraftesque story, and the wonderfully creepy *Blade and Bone* by Terry Lamsley.

Drawing on the great variety of horror writing, from psychological suspense to magical realism, the collection also provides an excellent opportunity to become acquainted with some of the great authors of the field.

Favourite stories of my own include those by Harlan Ellison, M. John Harrison, and especially Elizabeth Massie's *What happened When Mosby Poulson Had Her Painting Reproduced On The Cover Of The Phone Book* – which is truly disturbing.

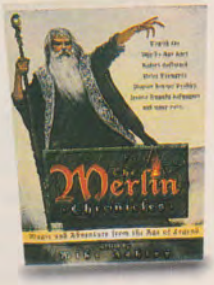
A classic anthology.

Gideon Kibblewhite

Score 9/10

The Merlin Chronicles

Edited by Mike Ashley Published by Robinson
Paperback £5.99 Out now



What a cocktail this is. No less than twenty-two short stories in 450 pages by the likes of Tanith Lee, Peter Tremayne, Marion Zimmer Bradley and Charles de Lint. All with one common theme; Merlin, the King's mage.

With stories of how Merlin grew up, tales from every period of the well-known fables and even stories of Merlin's death, this compendium attempts an extraordinary feat. It doesn't really work, being spoiled by too many different interpretations of Merlin and his world. To an extent that is understandable and unavoidable, even welcome, in an anthology like this; but when the character that's holding it all together is as well-known as Merlin there has to be a certain amount of care exercised to make sure that the reader isn't just confused.

"Mark his Kingship's mortal great whiskers with more hair in them than three horses' tails!"

Having said that, some of the stories are brilliant and with the option to just dip in occasionally rather than read the entire book from cover to cover, you could find yourself rewarded by this good-value book.

Steve Faragher Score 6/10

The Mammoth Book of Victorian & Edwardian Ghost Stories

Edited by Richard Dalby Published by Robinson
Paperback £5.99 Out now

The penultimate story of this anthology warns that it's "not artistically rounded-off, and nothing is explained in it," and in that it's almost unique. The other stories are explained all too clearly. You can't flip through the book without stumbling over a mysterious corpse-like suitor turning out to be a corpse, or a lucky traveller describing the woman who saved him in the nick of time from plunging down a well only to find that his saviour must surely have been "young Penny who's lain in her grave lo these five years".

So this isn't a book to be surprised by – and with titles like "Dog Or Demon?", "The Lost Room" and "The Doll's Ghost" it's clearly not meant to be – but it's one that jolly well wants to scare you, and one thing the

"Common-place words, these, but they were spoken with a peculiar quiet intonation, that impressed me" – The Underground Ghost, John Berwick Harwood

Victorians excelled at, apart from abusing children, was the ghost story. They could put enough spin on a "thing" or a "horrid" to alarm a pastor, and made italics and the occasional capital dance like sinister marionettes.

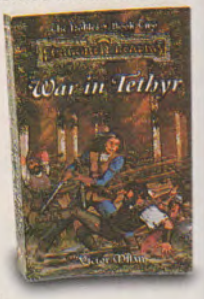
Suffering initially from trusting in the twist, the stories quickly get into their mid-1800s stride, propping up stock plots with persuasive dread and finishing with a zinger about an inexplicably slamming door and A Hand That Walks. Disappointingly few of the 43 tales have a sense of fun, but then these were people busy with marital rape and fitting small boys in chimneys. I'd have liked to have seen it stretch a little but you can't fault its style, and the editor's notes are brief and sharp. A splendid read.

Bob Barker

Score 7/10

War in Tethyr

by Victor Milán Published by TSR Paperback £4.99 Out now



Oh dear, oh dear. Victor Milán leaves almost no cliché unturned in this weak *Forgotten Realms* effort. From the book's corny beginning to its cheesy end, there is little of worth. A few background ideas may be found in its pages (there are a couple of good monsters, a take on body-snatching and some information about the city and people of Zazesspur) but you'll have to put up with an excruciating story.

It's the old one about a beautiful warrior and her unlikely band of adventurers uniting the locals against the chuckling villains. The A Team with swords, really.

All the old veterans are wheeled out; a dwarf that mutters and tears at his beard, a half-elven bard with a voice like a golden bell, the list goes on...

"Instead of being forbidding, his good looks were almost magically appealing..."

Game tie-in novels are hard to recommend when, like this one, all they supply is a dodgy story filled with constant references to how lithe, flat-bellied and supple the heroine is. There is a talking horse, though. Unfortunately, its name is Goldie and comes out with lines like "I sense trouble ahead, Randi Star."

Gideon Kibblewhite Score 2/10

Dark Knight of Karameikos

by Timothy Brown Published by TSR
Paperback £4.99 Out now

Timothy Brown is director of game development at TSR and so was a major player in the creation of Mystara, the setting for this, his first novel.

It is an exciting, though not original, epic following the fortunes of the chivalrous knight Sir Grygory of Karameikos as he battles the forces of evil which threaten the land of Traldara.

If the tale of revenge, self-doubt and ultimate courage is an ordinary one, it is also well-told and pacey, and builds to a breathless ending.

"Dark figures, armour clinking, appeared at the edge of the woods."

Dark Knight of Karameikos provides a rich vein of source material as well. The author's descriptive flair and his attention to detail adds much flesh to this world. There is much information to be had about its history and culture which is particularly important if players want to be knights running about in shining armour. Required reading for selfless heroes.

Gideon Kibblewhite Score 7/10

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Shadow Warriors West London Branch of The Guild of Melee and Magic meets every Saturday. Phone Gerald on **0181 7239008.**

New club forming. Contact Simon **01625 574931** Bollington/Macclesfield area.

contacts

Star Wars fans. Roleplayers. No Dark Jedis. Write Luke Skywalker, Lightsaber House, 31 Court Rd, Frampton, Cotterell BS17 2DE.

I am looking for an *AD&D* gaming group in Bicester/surrounding areas. Age 11-15. Call Chris on **01869 324754.**

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arcane scribblings

The door flew open. Phil the postman expired in a heap upon the floor, exhausted by the huge weight of letters he'd carried up the stairs. We applauded him.

Thanks to all of you who bothered to put pen to paper and send it off to us. It's good to know that so many of you enjoyed the first issue. Keep writing.

Dear Ed,

Just bought the first issue of **arcane** and thought it was great. I'm a keen roleplayer and I love *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*. I also have the *Call of Cthulhu* rulebook. Is there any chance of articles about these?

Mr D Eccles

Thank you for your compliments, Mr, er, Dee. We're unlikely to cover WFRP and CoC specifically because we've decided to only print generic material that's usable across lots of different systems. Having said that, we hope that you'll find lots of our stuff useful when you're running those games. Let us know how we do.

Dear arcane,

I thought I'd drop you a quick line, first to congratulate you on a very impressive first issue (here's hoping we see many more), and secondly to nip in the bud a misconception mentioned on the letters page and in one of the reviews. I wouldn't normally get involved in stuff like this directly, but hey, if somebody says something that's not right about a game you designed, I feel you've a right to say something!

Anyway, the misconception I refer to is that Games Workshop has dropped both *Man O'War* and *Blood Bowl*, and after 'only a few months', at that. Quite apart from the fact that both games were freely available for two years or more (a bit longer than 'a few months'!) the fact is that neither *Man O'War* nor *Blood Bowl* has been dropped from our range at all. It's true that neither game is carried in our retail stores any longer, but both are available from our Mail Order department, as are the full range of miniatures for the two games, and we will keep on running new material for the games in the Citadel Journal as long as we keep receiving it.

What is true is that we will not be producing any new material for *Man O'War* and *Blood Bowl*, at least for a couple of years. This is because we simply don't have the human resources available to design anything new for the games – we're all too busy doing other things – and therefore we've decided to put them on a back-burner until we can deal with them properly. Until then players will – shock! horror! – just have to make things up for themselves! Unless of course they want us to churn out inferior, money-making supplements just to keep them all quiet...

Jervis Johnson
Games Workshop Design Studio

That told us.

Dear arcane,

I read your review of the new White Wolf game with interest, as I have recently started playing in a *Changeling* based chronicle. However, I do not agree with some of the comments made in the review.

First, you state that the characters are kids. This is not really the case. I think that a more appropriate interpretation of a character's seeming is not the literal age of →

letters

the character, but is more a representation of their attitude and outlook on life.

Second, you pick out the fact that many of the changelings have moved to America, and that this has limited the appeal of using a European setting. However, you seem to have missed one of the fundamental rules of roleplaying: if you don't like something, change it. This is exactly what our storyteller has done in creating a chronicle based on the Isle of Man in 1965, that will, in the fullness of time, deal with the return of the Sidhe and the Accordance War. This has also enabled him to draw upon Celtic mythology, one of the main sources of faerie lore.

Dave Abrey
580-0@helios.herts.ac.uk

Steve says: I'm glad to see someone basing a campaign in the Isle of Man (land of my forefathers), I always thought it would be a fabulous place for a mythical campaign. As to your comments about our Changeling review, while I agree that you can always change something if you don't like it, that's hardly good grounds for a review is it? What did you think of that game? Well, if you were to change it, it'd be great...

Dear Editor,

Years back, a friend's running one of those monstrous *AD&D* games; like 10 players or something. One is a brand-newbie, first time ever at the gaming tables.

To cut to the chase, the group are arguing over the spoils of a big battle (treasure horde stuff). The debate's getting heated – people out of their seats, acting their little hearts out over bags of coins, a few minor magic weapons/items, etc.

Now, being the crafty, evil bastard my friend was (is), he had Mr New-guy sit next to him. You know, to help him with the game, etc. Well, while everyone is going ape at the other end of the table, New-guy asks the DM if he can look around in the less interesting treasure (some rugs, copper – you know the sort...) Well, what-do-you-know, Melvin there finds a nifty little ring. Nobody else found it, because they all went straight for the gold and jewels and shiny swords and stuff. The mundane junk was never touched.

So Melvin asks my DM friend, "Is the ring magic?"

Straight-faced, he replies, "You don't know."

"How do I find out?"

"Well, if you can't Detect Magic, you could try making the ring do something with words or thoughts."

"Oh," sayeth the innocent, "Okay. Can it change color?"

"You don't know."

"Well I ask it too." (remember, the "seasoned veterans" are still arguing over the loot and going at it full-bore.)

"What do you say to it?" asks the DM.

Melvin thinks (and here it comes...)

"Ring, I wish you were green."

The DM doesn't even twitch.

"Okay. It's green."

"Really?!," Melvin gasps, "Wow! A ring that changes color! Can it turn into gold?"

"Well, you have to ask it too."

"Okay, Ring! I wish you were gold."

A few heads turn. Realization is seeping across the table. Someone says, "hey..."

"Okay," says the DM, "it's gold."

"Wow!!!" yelps Melvin (muffled cries from afar turn into shouts. The other players are scrambling to stop the inevitable, but...) "RING! I WISH YOU WERE PLATINUM!!!"

Shouts of "NOOOOOOOO!!!!!"

And the DM says, "Okay, it's platinum... and it's going to stay platinum."

Yep. Ring of Three Wishes. Biggest, most bad-ass magic-item in the campaign, now just a kind of pretty, but strangely powerless, ring that changes color.

Wow... my friend is one sneaky sonofabitch...

Jim Sweeney
22bbaker@sirius.com

Jim, you win a T-shirt for the best letter we've recieved yet. Thank you.

Don't forget to join in the **arcane** forum if you have access to the internet. Access is at http:/futurenet.co.uk/

You may have noticed the first in our 'retro' features back on page 18. Does anybody have a favourite game that they would like to see covered in future issues?

arcane shorts

A brief selection from other letters

You may think me totally stupid for asking this, but underneath 'It Was a Time of Darkness' it said episode Two. How can this be?

Graeme Smith

Do you really think we're going to tell you?

The last I remember of collector's cards were bubble-gum footy cards at school, but these look much more interesting, you can actually do something with them...

Steve Taylor

Welcome to the late 20th Century.

I'll keep the crap to a minimum and just say "keep up the good work!"

Chris Milligan

Ta.

The typeface is a bit small in places but most likely that's because I'm blind as a bat these days.

Andy Anderson

Sorry to hear it.

Your magazine is the 'nutts'.

Chris Evans

Thanks. we think.

I currently read *The Duelist* and *Scrye*, but they are American.

Ian Hayward

Terrible, isn't it?

Does Maryanne still have reservations about killing fluffy animals in computer games?

Alistair Muir

No, she doesn't.

communication

If you'd like to get in touch with us there are several ways. The most traditional is to send us a letter addressed to **arcane**, 30 Monmouth St, Bath BA1 2BW. *The slightly more technically advanced can send us a* fax on (01225) 446019, *while all you fully fledged InfoCyberOtakuNauts out there can e-mail us at* arcane@futurenet.co.uk or visit our web site on http://www.futurenet.co.uk/ *We look forward to hearing from you.*

letters

Dear arcane,

I bought *Spellfire*! I know you probably pity me, but which cardgame should I buy? There are so many add-ons and booster packs. Isn't it all just a waste of money?

Evan Thomas

Magic: The Gathering *has to be the best to get into. Not only is it an excellent game, but you'll find loads of opposition...*

Dear arcane,

Congratulations on a great premiere issue. I am relatively new to roleplaying games of the non-computer game kind, and so I am in need of some advice. A few of my friends and I want to get into roleplaying and we are also big *Star Wars* fans, so what joy when I saw mentioned in the last issue a *Star Wars* RPG. Could you tell me if it's any good?

I also have the *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay* 1st edition but have not started this as only one of my friends is into *Warhammer* as I am. Should I buy the newer edition, or keep my old?

I look forward to your next issue.

Good adventuring,

Gavin Fitzgerald

A lot of people thought we gave too much space to CCGs in our first issue (a lot of others didn't). What do you think? Write and let us know.

Star Wars *is a great fun, and easy to use system. We can especially recommend it to newcomers. And the same goes for* Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay, *rescued from Games Workshop's dungeons by the intrepid Hogshead Publishing, although there's little point in buying the new version. It's not much different to the old one at all.*

Dear arcane,

Firstly, may I congratulate you on a good first issue, and as you've asked for reader input, I thought I'd write with a few comments. This magazine has been eagerly awaited by roleplayers in this country who previously had to subscribe to American publications.

For a premiere issue, **arcane** was both absorbing and highly informative, but let's not lose sight of what we're trying to achieve. Although computers and CCGs are both very much part of our hobby, both of these areas already have numerous magazines available, and I feel too much coverage was given to both, in relation to LARP and play-by-mail.

Also, although many of your reviews were excellent, some bordered on stupidity; e.g. *Banemaster*; the sarcasm was nothing but unprofessional. Who could blame youngsters for not continuing if they think the more experienced of us see them as 'pre-puberty subjects' who deserve no help.

M Reddick

Hmm. Maybe we were a bit hard on our younger readers, but we stand by the rest of our comments about Banemaster. *As to PBM and LARP, we are planning more coverage of these two areas in the near future. Watch this space...*

Dear arcane,

Congrats on producing one of the best, if not the best RPG mags ever. I think you have done really well to produce a magazine of such quality, with so much in it, on such varying subjects.

One small problem: why do some of your early letter writers have a bug about Games Workshop? In my 'educated' opinion, GW is not only the best miniature company in the world, but they produce real quality fantasy/sci-fi fiction.

James Parkin

There does seem to be an element of 'having it in' for Games Workshop, we agree. We think it may date back to the time when White Dwarf stopped being an independent magazine and became a catalogue for GW. Up until then people had relied on WD as their main source of info on all matters roleplaying and suddenly you could only read about GW's games in there, which upset some. What does anyone else think?

Dear arcane,

Congratulations on a very impressive début, **arcane** is well up to the standard set by *.net* and *SFX*, both in quality and style.

Here's the secret of the success of CCGs: not the lack of "any of that boring roleplaying" (as quoted by phil@philm.demon.co.uk last issue), but the lack of need for a referee to put in all the hours the gods send developing a campaign. Sure, you can while away hours twiddling a *Magic* deck, but it doesn't require the same *commitment* as campaign development.

Dr Anthony Allan

That and the fact that CCGs are great fun. Although it's certainly true that a lot of people play CCGs when they haven't got time to play anyting more 'serious'. Which is just what Magic *was designed for.*
.Net and SFX are sister publications of ours by the way, in case you didn't know already.

IT WAS A TIME OF DARKNESS

by TB Falsename Episode Two

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE:

Visiting their Uncle Selwyn at his country house, cousins Eric and Penny and their lower-class friend Snifter are astonished to discover, at the back of a large wardrobe, a glowing doorway. Going through the doorway, the chums find themselves inside a darkened building, but soon find an exit and step outside on to a grassy plain where they are met by a magnificent lion, who mauls Snifter badly.

Racing back to the building, our friends realise that by ill luck it is a discount furniture warehouse, and the lion with little effort catches and eats them. Uncle Selwyn dies in his bed, calling futilely for help.

In the faraway town of Akansaxchukabuk, meanwhile, the villainous Captain Raxinfraxin has again captured Princess Breasts, imprisoning her in a dungeon with little regard for her lovely hair.

Now read on.

*(**Scene:** The town's back streets. Night. Flickering torches. We dissolve to a cloaked figure scuttling furtively, careful to avoid the security chimeras – artistic lizards who sit atop strategic poles and sketch suspicious citizens. There is a sudden beggar.)*

BEGGAR: Spare something for the homeless?

(The figure gives him a wide berth.)

BEGGAR: God bless you, sir.

(The figure arrives at a shop and enters mysteriously, an effect that works best on paper. Inside, the eyepatched shopkeeper buffs his shiny counter.)

FIGURE *(mysteriously)*: Good evening.

SHOPKEEPER *(proudly indicating counter)*: Look at that. You could eat your dinner off that. *(He produces a cleaver.)* Go on – I dare you.

FIGURE: Errm… I'd like to hire some mercenaries. Some *currant* mercenaries.

SHOPKEEPER: Would those be mercenaries using wheat from the south-eastern province?

FIGURE: I believe my sister tells me so.

(The shopkeeper hands over a packet of buns. The figure accepts it and leaves mysteriously, but comes back immediately.)

FIGURE: Hang on, I've got it this time.

*(**Cut to:** Fortified tower, Princess Breasts' room. Rochangrafel, an immense man, stands guard.)*

ROCHANGRAFEL: It is useless to try and escape.

PRINCESS: Try *to* escape, you idiot. If I try *and* escape, then I succeed. God, I hate you illiterates.

ROCHANGRAFEL: An illiterate is someone who can't read, Princess. I was merely grammatically slack.

PRINCESS: Curses.

VOICES (off): Yabu! Zuks!

PRINCESS *(alarmed)*: What was that?

ROCHANGRAFEL: There are many strange creatures about the tower. It discourages visitors. I myself fought my way here single-handed, challenging each swamp-thing to a ritual duel – in their language, a 'minoot'.

PRINCESS: But you had sixty soldiers with you.

ROCHANGRAFEL *(dismissively)*: My seconds.

PRINCESS: What, all of them?

ROCHANGRAFEL: Everyone knows there are sixty seconds in a minoot.

VOICES (off): Droomwrol! Simbacrache!

(Sounds of wild applause.)

PRINCESS: At least I have my faithful nurse for company. She who suckled me as a babe and grew up to be my mentor, and that's one for the folks at home.

ROCHANGRAFEL: I fear she tried and attacked Dixdastardlax. His magic dispatched her to Hades.

PRINCESS *(her voice almost musical in her grief)*: Hell – oh, nurse!

VOICES (off): Boyce! Goephik!

*(**Cut to:** Misty forest. Cloaked figure enters, followed by mercenaries.)*

FIGURE: Stand back – I shall invoke the lord of the wood to help us. *(Gestures in manner of a conjuror. A rumbling shakes the clearing. Mist roils from a tree, which bulges and parts to reveal a human form. Track in on spirit's face.)* Behold – the Spirit of Ash.

ASH: Grovey.

FIGURE: Right then.

(Is the Spirit of Ash enough to overcome the magician Dixdastardlax? What ghastly buttered secret does the cloaked figure's lunchbox hold? Who is the gaunt stranger not mentioned in this episode either?)

TO BE CONTINUED…

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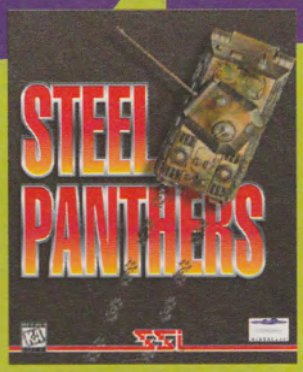

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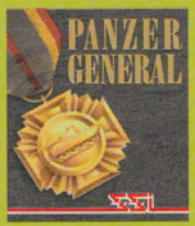

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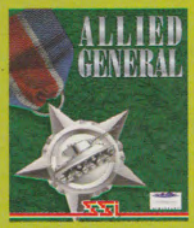

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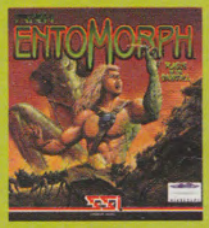

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